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Interdisciplinary middle school teaming

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INTERDISCIPLINARY MIDDLE SCHOOL TEAMING

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

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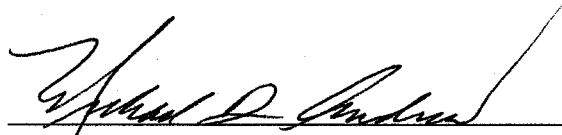
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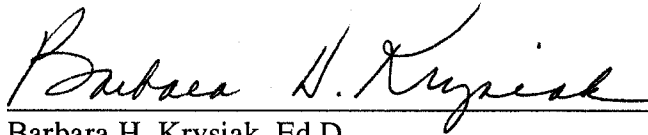
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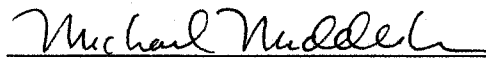
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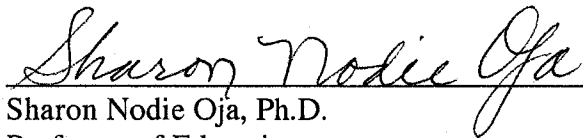
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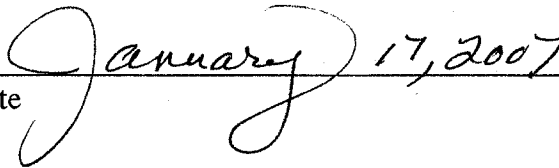
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DEDICATION

To my husband Frank, whose love, support, and understanding over many years made this possible. Thank you for your words of encouragement, especially during the most difficult times.

And

To my children, Jennifer and Rebecca, who were a constant source of support and encouragement.

And

To my father, Warren, for instilling in me a love for learning and always challenging me to investigate the “what if. . .” question.

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ABSTRACT

INTERDISCIPLINARY MIDDLE SCHOOL TEAMING

by

Donna J. Cronin

University of New Hampshire, May, 2007

The purpose of this study was to determine how the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings reflects team members' beliefs regarding the middle school concept and the school practices and cultural characteristics as delineated by the National Middle School Association (NMSA, 2005), which create successful middle schools for young adolescents.

The teachers of three interdisciplinary teams in an evolving middle school in the Northeast were participants in this bounded case study where the team was the unit of analysis.

Individual team member data were collected through individual audio taped interviews and validated by questionnaire responses from each participant. Team meeting discourse data were collected through researcher observation and audio taped team meetings.

Teacher belief data about middle school were examined in relation to each of the NMSA (2005) characteristics of a successful middle school. Team meeting discourse data were then examined to determine if individual teacher beliefs were reflected in team meetings.

This research found that individual teacher beliefs were reflected in team meetings but many beliefs were not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) characteristics for a successful middle school.

The most significant finding in this study was that although teacher beliefs were not necessarily the same for all teams, teacher beliefs were reflected in the substance of team meetings if team members held similar beliefs, if there were no competing priorities, and if the school culture supported their similar beliefs.

General findings and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When I consider the origins of my views, I realize that my personal history, by necessity, contributes considerably to my current belief systems. I write from a life lived in many margins, usually while struggling to approach the center of whichever page of my life is unfolding at the moment. It has been that struggle to understand and adapt to various contexts that has led me on a personal journey of discovering other realities (Delpit, 1995, p. 73).

What Delpit so aptly describes rings true for many educators who have experienced or are currently experiencing school reform efforts intended to improve student achievement among the millions of children in American middle schools. Among the many reform efforts that have emerged through the years, middle school reform has been perhaps one of the most challenging. The major challenges of middle school reform require not only structural change but also, in many cases, altering the educational philosophy of those who are expected to implement reform efforts.

According to the National Middle School Association (NMSA) 2003, the ways schools organize teachers and students have a significant impact on the learning environment. "The interdisciplinary team of two to four teachers working with a common group of students is the signature component of high-performing (middle) schools, literally the heart of the school from which other desirable programs evolve" (p. 29).

To implement interdisciplinary team teaching, teachers from different disciplines must learn to work closely together. What this means for the autonomous teacher who

has always taught with a closed door policy, content being central, is that he/she must now learn how to be a collaborator. Teachers who value their classroom autonomy may perceive teaming as an infringement on their independence. Middle school philosophy requires a shift in focus from content as the focus to the child as the focus. While curriculum is only one aspect of teaming, the teacher needs to recognize that he/she is responsible not only for the academic growth of the child but also the social, psychological, and moral development of the child. Changing one's educational philosophy can create that "struggle to understand and adapt to various contexts" as one discovers "other realities" (Delpit, 1995, p. 73).

This current study examines a few pages in the lives of teachers on three middle school interdisciplinary teaching teams at a middle school in northern New England as they journey to discover, understand, and implement middle school reform.

Study of middle school teachers who are on interdisciplinary teaching teams was prompted by the researcher's personal struggle to discover and understand the realities involved to move from a traditional junior high school model to the middle school model. In light of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001, middle schools are now faced with the additional challenges of employing highly qualified educators and meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP). This only emphasizes more the importance and the need for this study. Dan French (2003), director of the Center of Collaborative Education in Boston, Massachusetts, sees NCLB as a threat to exemplary middle school education:

The advent of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 has plunged us into an unprecedented era of high stakes testing, coupled with the threat of not being promoted from grade to grade and of not graduating from high school and will be the engine that drives improvement in instruction and student achievement. Yet there are many flaws to this approach, an approach that, under the mantle of

equity and excellence, threatens to undermine the tenets of exemplary middle grades practice, and leave behind the very students that the legislation and testing movement purport to be helping (pp. 14-15).

Improving student achievement and meeting the developmental needs of young adolescents may be lost as middle schools are expected to meet the NCLB requirements that emphasize content knowledge.

Personal History and Experience

It is important for the reader and the researcher to first look at what personal experiences are brought to the current study. The researcher needs to be constantly aware that personal experiences with interdisciplinary teaming have the potential of skewing interpretation of data collected. At the same time, the researcher recognizes that personal experiences are “a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 28). Also in Maxwell, quoting Alan Peshkin, “Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than exorcise” (p. 28).

Through the late nineties, a northern New England school district was responsible for educating the children in grades kindergarten through grade six from the town of Fieldstone as well as the children in grades seven through twelve from five surrounding towns. These towns were referred to as the ‘sending’ towns.

In 1997 this school district separated into two distinct districts; the Fieldstone district and the Region school district, both of which remained under the same School Administrative Unit (SAU). The Fieldstone school district was responsible for the education of children in grades kindergarten through grade five from the town of Fieldstone while the Region school district was responsible for educating the children in grades six through twelve from all six towns. The driving force of this separation seemed

to be a more equitable distribution of the Region district operating costs as well as a more equitable voice with regard to the assets of the district.

At the time of the separation, a decision was made to house grades six through eight in a new multi-million dollar facility built in one of the 'sending' towns specifically designed to support the middle school concept of academic teaming and "whole child" emphasis. Prior to this, children in grade six from Fieldstone and the children in grades seven and eight from all six towns attended a traditional junior high school. A decision was also made to form four interdisciplinary teams in grade six when the school opened with the expectation to do the same in grade seven the next year and grade eight the year following.

Teachers from the 'sending' towns, newly hired teachers from out of district, and teachers from the junior high school, many of whom were veteran teachers, moved into the new facility in August of 1998. The majority of the faculty had little or no experience with the team concept. The researcher did have experiences with teaming prior to moving into the new middle school.

In 1991, the researcher experienced learning from the student learner perspective during a two week intense summer Critical Skills Program offered by a New England graduate school. The heart of the program was designed around collaborative group work where the participants and the instructors replicated a critical skills classroom in which two groups (teams) were formed. In this setting, the participants were the student learners as the instructors modeled the interactive environment one could expect in the classroom.

This experience of feeling the frustrations associated with collaborative group work and the recognition that there was more to the teaching-learning process than she had previously understood caused the researcher not only to think about how children learn but also to think about her own learning and professional growth.

In the fall of 1992, the researcher became a participant in a Mathematics and Science Collaborative (MSC) project; a partnership formed among four New England middle/junior high schools and a local university. The researcher was a member of a six person MSC team in the context of a traditional junior high school. In effect, the team adopted a middle school philosophy within the context of a largely traditional junior high school setting. For this school-university project, it was generally agreed that there were some specific elements that would serve as guidelines for team functioning: common planning time, collaboration, and curriculum integration. These are commensurate with several of the NMSA 2005 recommendations regarding teaming.

The focus of the MSC project was the integration of mathematics and science curricula aimed at empowering middle school mathematics and science teachers to “utilize hands-on, interactive teaching methods while stimulating their students to attain an accurate, sustained, and applied understanding of basic concepts,” while the objective of the project was “school-wide, sustained reform (based on middle school philosophy) rather than isolated curriculum tinkering or packaging that might end up on the bottom shelf” (Kull, Andrew, Bauer, & Oja, 1995, pp. 61-62).

The MSC team began the “full blown” experience during the next four years of what teaming entails and the struggle of working together toward a shared vision of mathematics/science curriculum integration. The team encountered much conflict often

associated with making decisions regarding student scheduling, curriculum integration, student outcomes, and perceptions of the team within the whole school environment (Robb & Cronin, 2001).

What was learned early in this collaborative effort first and most important was the importance of communication. In retrospect, a communication gap between the university and the school team and among team members themselves was uncovered. “This early communication gap became an underlying factor and unrecognized model portending a failure to identify and solve problems in a timely manner as the project went on” (Robb & Cronin, 2001, p. 118). Because all participants did not have the same understanding of the goals of the MSC project nor fully understand the power they had to effect change, many unspoken assumptions were made. Some participants did not trust other members of the team or graduate students from the university sent to help team members, nor did participants feel they were supported by the administration of the school. This led to much conflict among team members and at one point the team was ready to withdraw from the project. According to Robb and Cronin (2001), and reinforced by current NMSA (2005) literature (p. 30), collaborative understandings and teaming in particular, may require a cultural shift.

It is essential to establish a new culture that embodies the goals and folkways of the collaborative project while recognizing the norms of the original, long-standing cultures that still ground each participant. Real change happened when we literally worked side-by-side, ‘walking a mile in each others shoes’, coming to understand what each person had to offer, and recognizing the power in collective, collaborative work. We also learned that some people are not well suited for collaboration and should not be put in a situation that requires a full commitment to it (p. 129).

As a result of this communication conflict, the researcher conducted a small study of the six MSC team members to investigate the change struggle, especially with regard

to collaborative decision making. The results of this small study revealed that all participants were confused about the project from its inception and that all participants were at different stages in their adult development. Although MSC team members experienced the same changes within a given setting, their individual interpretations were very different. This may explain why the MSC team struggled with conflict and conflict resolution with respect to decision making (Cronin, 1995). Differing interpretations or beliefs among team members may pose a potential problem for middle schools despite support for the team concept. This is supported by other research such as Crow and Pounder (2000), Rottier (2000), and Chrispeels and Martin (2002).

Because of individual backgrounds, experiences, belief systems, and potential shifts in educational philosophy, it is important to study the complexities of interdisciplinary teaming from the perspective of the participants. Those who make the decisions about instituting interdisciplinary teaming, although they might acknowledge that change is difficult, may not fully understand the effects teaming will have on the teachers expected to function as a team. There is a dearth of descriptive data on what teams actually do when they meet and make decisions or not, so it is difficult to account for problems related to team functioning. Personal experiences and current educational theory and research have been combined to shape the current study of the interdisciplinary teaming process in a middle school.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to determine how the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings reflects team members' beliefs regarding the middle school concept and

the school practices and cultural characteristics, as delineated by the NMSA (2005), which create successful middle schools for young adolescents.

The teams were housed in an evolving middle school in the Northeast. Data were collected on each team member's beliefs regarding middle school as well as data on team meeting discourse. This study examined how the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings reflects team member beliefs regarding the middle school and the school practices and cultural characteristics recommended by the NMSA (2005).

Currently there are few studies that examine teachers' beliefs about middle school philosophy and if those beliefs are reflected in the discourse that takes place at team meetings. Although the current study parallels the researcher's personal history and experience which are typical of current realities in middle school evolution, the current challenges of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 adds to the importance of studying teacher beliefs and shifts in educational philosophy in the context of an evolving middle school.

This study contributes to our knowledge of what happens to teachers on interdisciplinary teams and how individual beliefs about middle school may strengthen or hinder the functioning of an interdisciplinary team; the signature component of a successful middle school (Juvonen, et al., 2004).

Definition of Terms

To ensure clarity for the readers of this research, terms are defined below. The National Middle School Association (2005) standards were used to define these terms within the context of this research.

Advisory Program: An advisory program is one in which one adult and a small (ideally 10-12) group of students have the opportunity to meet on a regularly scheduled basis in order to provide a caring environment for academic guidance and support, everyday administrative details, recognition, and activities to promote citizenship (NMSA, 1996).

Adult Advocate: An adult advocate is an adult who is knowledgeable about adolescent development, who provides a caring environment for academic guidance and support, who is responsive to the needs of the adolescent, and who knows the student well enough as an individual to know if the student needs guidance support. Advisory programs are a means to provide an adult advocate. For the purpose of this study, the parent is the primary advocate.

Assessment and Evaluation: Assessment and evaluation include measures that are varied, continuous, authentic, and appropriate for reporting every student's learning progress.

Collaborative Leadership: Leadership is demonstrated by person(s) who establish a culture where teachers, parents, community members, and students work together to turn a shared vision of high expectations into reality; continually challenging the status quo in the name of school improvement. For the purpose of this study, the school leader is the school principal.

Communication: Communication refers to any interactions among persons, both verbal and non-verbal. Some examples are team meeting discourse, parent conferences, email, and meetings with school personnel who are not members of the team.

Curriculum: Curriculum is not only the content and skills taught but also embraces every planned aspect of the school's educational program. Curriculum should be relevant, challenging, integrated, and exploratory.

Flexible Scheduling: Flexible scheduling is a schedule that allows a team to alter the school day schedule from equally divided class periods to a format that provides fewer, but longer flexible class time.

High Expectations for All: High expectations involves seeing and appealing to the best in young adolescents in all their diversity, making sure that those expectations are realistic ones, and promoting ways to help adolescents realize their potential in every realm of development. These expectations extend to adults who work to support this development.

Instruction: Instruction includes teaching approaches that enhance and accommodate the diverse skills and abilities of students through engagement and interaction with emphasis on cooperation and collaboration.

Interdisciplinary Team: An interdisciplinary team consists of two to four core academic teachers who share the responsibility of the planning for and the teaching of a common group of students and who are held mutually accountable for their decisions regarding those students.

Knowledgeable Educators: Knowledgeable educators are certified educators who value working with young adolescents and who have received specific preparation for the specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for teaching young adolescents.

Middle School: A middle school, for this study, is defined as a school that is six to eight grade configured and organized with grade level interdisciplinary teaching teams.

Parental Contact: Parental contact is verbal or written communication to inform parents of student achievement, student behaviors, available support services, volunteer programs, or other programs that support student learning. Some examples are telephone calls to parents, parent conferences, email, team newsletters, and school newsletters.

Professional Development: Professional development includes ongoing course work, workshops, or job embedded programs that provide adults with knowledge and skills that are directly related to the school's goals for student and teacher success and growth.

Supportive Environment: A supportive environment is one that promotes in-depth learning and enhances students' physical and emotional well-being.

Traditional Junior High School: A traditional junior high school, for this study, is a school that is configured as grade six through eight and that is departmentalized by academic discipline with a focus on content.

In the next chapter the literature pertinent to middle school philosophy and the school practices and cultural characteristics, as delineated by NMSA (2005), for a successful middle school are reviewed and studies that support the research in the current study are examined.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature pertinent to middle school philosophy and the middle school practices and cultural characteristics as defined and recommended by the National Middle School Association (2005). In order to shed light on the purpose of this research, it is important to first look at the historical events that have led up to the most recent NMSA (2005) recommendations crucial to an effective middle school. Those recommendations are:

Cultural Characteristics

High Expectations	Courageous, Collaborative Leadership	Active Learning
Adult Advocate	School-Initiated Partnerships	Shared Vision
Safe Environment	Knowledgeable Educators	

School Practices

Organizational Structures	Assessment and Evaluation
Multiple Learning and Teaching Approaches	Health, Wellness, and Safety
Relevant, Challenging, Integrative, Exploratory Curriculum	Guidance and Support

The History of Middle Schools

To uncover and study the challenges that interdisciplinary team members face, it is necessary to look at a number of different aspects related to interdisciplinary teaming as it has evolved in the middle school. The evolution of the middle school definition of the team concept, the dialogic of teams, the need to know individually held beliefs about

middle school, and how individuals interact in the team setting are important aspects of interdisciplinary teaming (Robb & Cronin, 2001; Cronin, 2000).

Concerns about middle level education began in the last century and will, in all likelihood, continue to be a topic of discussion for researchers well into this century. In the 1920s, the junior high school was gaining acceptance, and major statements identifying important characteristics of this new institution were put forth, including those by two major founders, Leonard Koos and Thomas Briggs. Briggs (1920) stated: "In its essence the junior high school is a device of democracy whereby nurture may cooperate with nature to secure the best results possible for each individual adolescent as well as for the society at large" (p. 327).

There was a six fold increase in the number of junior high schools between 1922 and 1938 in spite of the apparent failure of a large number of students to progress to higher grades (Bossing & Cramer, 1965). During the 1940s and 1950s, as efforts were made to bring about the renaissance of the junior high school, some writers described what these schools ought to be like. The most influential statement was developed by Gruhn and Douglass (1947). They proposed and described six major functions: integration, exploration, guidance, differentiation, socialization, and articulation. These functions remain today as a foundational framework for defining an effective middle level school despite the popularity of the subject-matter model during the intervening years. In the mid-1950s, Gruhn and Douglass (1956) emphasized again the importance of their 1947 proposal. In spite of increased discussion about the educational goals and functions of the junior high schools during this time, the schools themselves remained about the same.

In the 1960s, William Alexander advanced the concept of a middle school for grades 5-8 or grades 6-8 as an alternative to the 7-9 junior high school which had shown itself to be rather intransigent, dominated by the senior high school model, and not what Koos and Briggs had envisioned in their 1920s definition. The junior high school was more like a younger and smaller version of the high school with a focus on content rather than on an environment specifically designed to meet the needs of the early adolescent.

At the same time, secondary school enrollments were declining while elementary enrollments were expanding due to the increase in births and the increasing popularity of early childhood education (Juvonen, Vi-Nhaun, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004). The shortage of space at the elementary level forced the sixth grade to the junior high level. Attracting immediate interest, in a time of overall cultural reform, the middle school idea became the focus of a reform movement, especially among those who earlier wanted to reform the junior high school.

During the 1970s, societal changes, including the civil rights movement, affected the speed of school reorganization efforts. Between 1970 and 1986, the number of junior high schools decreased by slightly more than half while the number of six through eight middle schools almost tripled (Juvonen, et al., 2004).

Alexander and George (1981) in their book *The Exemplary Middle School* wrote about a new philosophy of how middle schools should work, presenting a new middle school concept:

Children of middle school age have their unique characteristics and needs which cannot be subordinated to the impact of the elementary school nor to the demands of the high school. An effective middle school must not only build upon the program on earlier childhood and anticipate the program of secondary education to follow, but it must be directly concerned with the here-and-now problems and

interests of the students. Furthermore, the middle school should not be envisioned as a passive link in the chain of education below the college and university, but rather as a dynamic force in improving education (p. 2).

Because what constituted an effective middle school had not yet been defined, the relatively new National Middle School Association (NMSA) published a position paper in 1982 entitled, *We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*. This document included ten essential elements of a 'true' middle school as understood at that time (NMSA, 1982, pp. 10-15):

- Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents
- A balanced curriculum based on student needs
- A range of organizational arrangements
- Varied instructional strategies
- A full exploratory program
- Comprehensive advising and counseling
- Continuous progress for students
- Evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of young adolescents
- Cooperative planning
- Positive school climate

These elements became a commonly cited standard for defining a middle school. At a time when the number of middle schools was growing exponentially, the influence of this document was substantial. However the concept of interdisciplinary teaming (small communities of learning) was not mentioned at this time.

After two years of studying the developmental needs of young adolescents and the conditions in schools established to educate them, the Council on Adolescent Development of the Carnegie Corporation in New York released, with great fanfare, the report *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (1989), thus putting middle grade education in the public arena. The report emphasized both the perils that adolescents face and the potential they could reach. According to the Council, "A volatile mismatch exists between the organization and curriculum of middle grades

schools, and the intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal needs of young adolescents” (Carnegie, 1989, p. 32). *Turning Points* presented eight major recommendations needed to improve the education of young adolescents. The major differences between the 1982 recommendations of the NMSA and 1989 Carnegie recommendations are associated with curriculum and evaluation procedures for student work. The NMSA recommended a balanced curriculum based on student needs while the Carnegie report endorsed a core academic program. Evaluation procedures were not addressed in the Carnegie report.

In 1992, realizing that a decade had passed since the publication of *We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*, NMSA reissued the 1982 document with minor formatting changes (NMSA, 2003). The substance of the document remained unchanged.

In 1995, the NMSA, having recognized that a more thorough examination of middle school education was needed, released *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*. This completely new position paper reflected changes in conditions and lessons learned since 1982. This document presented and described six characteristics that developmentally responsive middle level schools should exhibit and identified six components necessary to create the kinds of schools young adolescents need and deserve (NMSA, 1995). This 1995 version of *This We Believe* expanded the 1992 version by adding two essential elements of a ‘true’ middle school: a shared vision and high expectations for all.

Although *Turning Points* (Carnegie, 1989) briefly discussed preparing teachers for the middle grades, more emphasis was placed on the needs of the student rather than on the needs of the teacher who was expected to implement the middle school

philosophy. While *Turning Points* served as a catalyst for middle school reform, the Carnegie Corporation issued an in-depth update of the 1989 report – *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century* by Anthony Jackson, lead author of the 1989 Carnegie report, and Gayle Davis who had been active in national middle school reform efforts. *Turning Points 2000* was based on the findings from ten years of research and practice data from middle schools around the country. *Turning Points 2000* refined and elaborated on the 1989 Carnegie report. Changes in curriculum were reflected in this version of *Turning Points*. Instead of a core curriculum for all, the new recommendation was to provide a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards, relevant to concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best. In addition to the recommendation to staff middle schools with teachers who are expert in teaching young adolescents (Carnegie, 1989), the 2000 report recommended engaging teachers in ongoing professional development opportunities.

In both *Turning Points* reports, an area that is especially deficient is that of interdisciplinary teaming which has become the foundation of the middle school concept. Although these reports do not specifically mention interdisciplinary teaming, the recommendations were functionally interpreted by those creating middle schools as interdisciplinary teaming. Thus, teaming of teachers and students began to evolve.

In 2002, only seven years after the 1995 NMSA release of *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*, a committee, composed of middle school experts, was charged with the task of revising and rewriting, as necessary, NMSA's 1995 position paper. The result was the 2003 NMSA publication of *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*. The new format of the NMSA's

vision for a successful middle school separated eight recommendations that are characterized by the culture of the school and six practices that can evolve within that culture. Two important recommendations added were a requirement of courageous, collaborative leadership and students and teachers should be engaged in active learning. The NMSA vision for a responsive and successful middle school requires that all features are “interdependent and must be implemented in concert” (NMSA, 2003, p. 2).

Although *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (NMSA, 2003) updated and expanded an understanding of young adolescents and appropriate schools for them, NMSA released *This We Believe in Action: Implementing Successful Middle Level Schools* in 2005. This book provides detailed explanations of the fourteen characteristics of a successful middle school and comes complete with a DVD illustrating each of those fourteen characteristics through five or six video clips. NMSA hopes that each clip will reveal new perspectives to assist those who seek to understand and see successful middle schools in action. In effect, this document provides a set of recommendations and action items or categories for successful functioning of a middle school.

“Unlike the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, which focuses on a narrow curriculum spectrum, *Turning Points 2000* and *This We Believe in Action* (NMSA, 2005) examine the entire school experience of young adolescents” (NMSA, 2005, p. xii).

This We Believe in Action (NMSA, 2005) identifies school practices and cultural characteristics that work in concert to create successful middle schools. These practices and characteristics are of equal importance and are interdependent since culture and practice work together; one influences the other (NMSA, 2005). “These elements

constitute a system of interrelated parts that function to support each other, ensuring success for every student” (NMSA, 2005, p. 3). The elements are as follows:

Cultural Characteristics

High Expectations	Courageous, Collaborative Leadership	Active Learning
Adult Advocate	School-Initiated Partnerships	Shared Vision
Safe Environment	Knowledgeable Educators	

School Practices

Organizational Structures	Assessment and Evaluation
Multiple Learning and Teaching Approaches	Health, Wellness, and Safety
Relevant, Challenging, Integrative, Exploratory Curriculum	Guidance and Support

Important to the successful implementation of these school practices and cultural characteristics are the belief systems of those people who are expected to implement the recommendations. As NMSA (2005) stated, “These elements constitute an interdependent web of beliefs about education, **ones that have to be held by faculty and staff** (emphasis added) in successful middle level schools” (p. 179). Since interdisciplinary teaming has been characterized as a defining feature of middle schools (Clark & Clark, 1994; Hackman, Petzko, Valentine, Clark, Nori, & Lucas, 2002; NMSA, 1995), individually held beliefs of team members about teaching and learning are important to examine.

Teaming and Teacher Beliefs

Teachers generally enter education with a belief about teaching and learning based on their personal experiences and influences throughout life (Wald & Castleberry, 2000). They do not often question their beliefs and actions relying too often on the way they learned when they were in school (Daniels, 2001). Thus individuals bring a set of

personal beliefs and values that have been formed over the years to the middle school team setting. As Creswell (1998) noted:

Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it; knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with personal biases and values; knowledge is written in a personal, up-close way; and knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied (p. 19).

One important statement NMSA asserts is that the NMSA (2005) characteristics for a successful middle school (see page 19) are an interdependent web of beliefs about education that must be held by faculty and staff. As Wald and Castleberry (2000) note, teachers bring their own beliefs to the school setting which do not necessarily reflect the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school or what teachers think they should do at team meetings. Thus, when schools consider a reform effort, it is important to consider individual teachers' beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning rather than making assumptions about the school faculty as a whole (Aubry, 1996; Datnow, 2000; Smylie, 1988). Smylie (1988) found that individual teachers' perceptions and beliefs about their own practices were the most significant predictors of individual change.

Others have suggested that most middle school teachers' belief systems are consistent with traditional viewpoints about the nature of teaching and learning which are inconsistent with the philosophy of addressing academic diversity within the middle school environment (Brighton & Hertberg, 2004). Brighton and Hertberg also reported that to address the needs of the diverse middle school student population, the teacher must be willing to examine and change traditional beliefs and practices in order to accommodate new instructional strategies that recognize and respond to the diverse

academic needs of students. Such strategies would include a variety of teaching approaches, question posing by students, learning inventories, projects, and student reflection as opposed to didactic approaches.

What seems to have happened in our culture is that “middle school” is used frequently but with no real understanding of what the phrase means or how individually held beliefs of teaching and learning can help or hinder implementation of the middle school concept. Dickinson and Butler (2001) see this as “both a structural problem of the lack of implementation as well as a disposition problem of belief in and attention to the concept” (p. 8).

Many middle schools have implemented the middle school concept in varying degrees because the middle school movement has not forcibly argued that the concept is a totally integrated ecology of schooling. Dickinson and Butler (2001) stated: “It (middle school) is an organizational, curricular, instructional, and relational environment that cannot be parsed or broken” (p. 8). Many teachers are comfortable with their old ways of teaching and have not examined or been challenged to examine their practice. Since teachers are not accustomed to thinking about new ways to do their work, teacher teams may not fully explore and develop new approaches to teaching. Strongly held norms about how the school functions and individual autonomy may cause teachers to be reluctant to influence the performance behaviors of others in the team setting (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004). Crow and Pounder (2000) found that team members who did not “buy into the teaming idea” (p. 230) were reluctant to share responsibilities, thus placing added responsibilities on other team members which affected team performance.

There is a plethora of research about the characteristics of a successful middle school such as use of common planning time, models of truly integrated curriculum, and the nature and effects of teaming without looking at the middle school model holistically. Little research has been conducted on how individual teacher beliefs about middle school are reflected in the context of team meetings and the effect these beliefs have on the middle school implementation process. As Wald and Castleberry (2000) stated, "Once we realize that people view information differently because they operate from different beliefs and assumptions, we can work at seeing the situation from different perspectives. In this way, we open new ways of thinking and acting" (p. 9). This challenge forms the basis for examining individual team member beliefs in relation to the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school.

For an interdisciplinary middle school team, individual team members could very well have differing beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. Examination of individual teacher beliefs about middle school in relation to the NMSA (2005) recommendations as well as how those beliefs are reflected (or not) at team meetings can inform a school community about progress toward becoming a successful middle school.

Therefore, it is important to review the literature regarding those NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school while gathering information about the individual beliefs of middle school teachers regardless of those recommendations.

The NMSA (2005) characteristics of a successful middle school are examined here in no particular sequence. All elements carry equal weight according to NMSA (2005). Subtopics of some elements are reviewed within major characteristics where pertinent to the study.

Organizational Structures

“Organizational structures that facilitate learning and nurture relationships have to be flexible, small learning communities (or teams) so the needs of students can be recognized and adjustments made in form and function to maximize learning” (NMSA, 2005, p. 141).

Since the interdisciplinary teaching team provides a framework where relationships are formed so that teaching and learning are more effective (NMSA, 2005), the work of the interdisciplinary team is important and complex.

Although interdisciplinary teaming is perceived as an organizational arrangement, it must be much more. According to NMSA (2003), a successful middle school creates a cultural context whereby educators value working with young adolescents and are prepared to do so. “The culture of an organization can determine, to a large degree, what we will believe and disbelieve and how we will view the events in our lives” (Thompson, 2002, p. 226). Reculturing is defined as changes that occur as a result of educators reflecting upon, evaluating, and expanding their own mental models regarding the education of young people (Senge, 1990). Even though interdisciplinary teams are deemed essential to the middle school culture, NMSA (2005) also recommends that these teams take on a leadership role with the principal. Strong leaders take control of the setting and establish the environment for enhanced student learning. Thus collaborative leadership is considered first as an organizational structure.

I. Collaborative Leadership

“High performing middle schools have high-performing, learning-centered leaders – principals and teachers – working collaboratively to enhance student learning” (NMSA, 2005, p. 19).

Over the years, schools have functioned under the top-down model of management. However, in the context of school reform efforts, this model no longer serves the good of the schools that we strive to improve.

In *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, The National Commission of Teaching and America's Future (1996) provided a warning, "There has been no previous time in history when the success, indeed the survival of nations and people, has been so tied to their ability to learn. Every school must be organized to support powerful teaching and learning" (p. 3).

Substantive improvement in teaching and learning can be difficult under the best of circumstances. Elmore (2000) said that "The chances for substantive change increase dramatically when strong, visionary leadership exists. Effective leaders help everyone overcome difficult challenges to achieve excellence for all students" (p. 291). Elmore further added, "With strong consistent leadership at all levels, including national study groups, state and local officials, building administrators and teachers, we can create the middle schools our nation's children deserve and that we all desire" (p. 292). In the middle school model these leaders would primarily include the building principal, assistant principal, and the interdisciplinary team leaders.

School communities need leaders who are committed to continuous school-wide learning and who can challenge students and professionals to transform schools into powerful learning communities (Wald & Castleberry, 2000). To create powerful learning communities "The job of today's principal is to ask questions rather than provide answers, to facilitate the process of school improvement rather than prescribe how it should be done, and to suggest alternatives to former policies and practices rather than

mandate the ones that will be used” (NMSA, 2005, p. 21). In *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) the authors stated, “One of the most consistent findings in educational research is that high-achieving schools have strong, competent leaders” (p. 156) yet “Few middle grades principals have received training in shared leadership and decision making” (p. 157).

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), in a study of school leadership, confirmed the conclusions reached by Jackson and Davis, “School leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning” (p. 3). Their studies further indicated that effective leadership is the result of setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization (p. 8), clearly not a hierarchical model of leadership.

Making middle school teaming work to benefit teaching and learning begins with principals (Rottier, 1996). Teske and Schneider (1999) studied eight New York City schools and concluded that an effective principal possessed certain qualities: a vision, a coherent education mission, goals, the ability to control staff selection, and set high expectations. Crow and Pounder (2000), in a study of four interdisciplinary teacher teams, contend that the principal’s behavior was perceived as an important organizational context feature. Although training and support were provided during the initial stages of teaming, teachers criticized the principal for failing to provide ongoing support as the team went through subsequent stages of development. Crow and Pounder (2000) also reported that teachers were bothered by comments made by the principal which compared teams thus creating competition among teams rather than promoting an atmosphere of collaborative leadership.

The National Association for Elementary School Principals, the professional association for middle school principals, has outlined qualities for successful school leaders. “The principal should be able to balance management and leadership roles, set high standards, demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement, create a culture of adult learning, and actively engage the community” (Juvonen, et al., 2004, p. 65).

Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, and Petzko (2002) reported that “Given the crucial nature of leadership to the success of a middle school, it is disturbing to note that very few middle level principals have had formal coursework in middle level education” (p. 63).

Although school administrators are often emphasized as being the most important component to the success of a school community, teacher leadership at the school level has to be included (Schmoker, 1999). “Principals do not have to implement changes themselves. Change has a much better chance of going forward when principals team up with teachers who help to translate and negotiate new practices with the faculty. The combination of principals and teacher leaders is a potent combination” (p. 116). As Fullan (1997) stated, “Principals can make even more long-lasting contributions by broadening the base of leadership of those with whom they work – teachers, parents, students” (p. 46).

According to Leonard and Leonard (2001),

Professional collaboration is evidenced when teachers and administrators work together, share their knowledge, contribute ideas, and develop plans for the purpose of achieving educational and organizational goals. In effect, collaborative practice is exemplified when school staff members come together on a regular basis in their continuing attempts to be more effective teachers so that their students can become more successful learners (p. 10).

Rottier (1996) found that middle schools with strong team leaders moved faster and farther and achieved more success than those that rotate team leadership. He also found that it is important to have written expectations for team member roles, especially for the team leader. Team leader responsibilities might include leadership in establishing team goals, presiding over team meetings, facilitating discussion, involving all members in discussions, encouraging open, honest communication in sharing ideas, facilitating integration of course content and skills, coordinating development of interdisciplinary units, helping the team assess progress toward goals, coordinating parent/team conferences, and representing the best interests of the entire team at team leader/principal meetings (Rottier, 1996).

Even with a sense of collaborative leadership in place, Fauske and Schelble (2000) reported that teams interacted and negotiated with the school principal and others to establish a balance of authority between the team and administration. Pounder (1998) reported that teams struggled with mutual accountability for their group decisions rather than depending on the support and protection of their principal. Studies that speak to the issue of mutual accountability as well as other factors that are deemed crucial by NMSA (2005) are examined next.

II. Teaming

“The hallmark of an effective middle level school rests in its capacity to personalize learning. Small learning communities or learning teams hold remarkable possibilities for student development when teams are high functioning and well implemented. Effective teams share a commitment to improving student, team, and school performance” (NMSA, 2005, p. 142-143).

Interdisciplinary teaming is a complex organizational structure and is first addressed generally then team communication, common planning time, shared vision,

and team norms are considered specifically because they are recognized by NMSA (2005) as major factors for teaming.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) define a team “as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (p. 45). However, creating a small group of people for the purpose of working together no way ensures that the group becomes a team. One must also consider that the individual teacher and his/her autonomy has been the focus for compensation and performance evaluation for many years in education.

Mainstream American culture emphasizes individual accomplishment in many aspects of society which can be perceived as a contradiction to the team concept of mutual accountability. In the field of education, this team concept might promote an atmosphere of mistrust among members who are to engage in shared responsibility and accountability, a contradiction to the norm for teachers, who in prior contexts, have only been responsible and accountable for themselves (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004). Individual beliefs are likely rooted in individualistic behaviors.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) also reported that failure to establish clear goals for schooling may explain why so much apparent teamwork is futile: “Far too many teams casually accept goals that are neither demanding, precise, realistic, nor actually held in common. Teamwork alone never makes a team” (p. 21). This finding is confirmed in the researcher’s own experience in which team members ultimately sought expert assistance in developing and accepting common goals (Robb & Cronin, 2001). Katzenbach and Smith found, among dozens of teams they studied, that to bring a group together, the

group must have a common goal for which the group holds itself jointly accountable. However, teachers who previously worked in isolation “reach a point where they become set in their ways and therefore are more reluctant to consider pursuing common improvement goals” (Schmoker, 1999, p. 25).

Katzenbach and Smith also stated that having a clear common purpose and a set of related performance goals, not personality or predisposition, promotes effective teamwork (p. 44). Once teams have been formed, teachers must learn to work collaboratively, share responsibilities, and set attainable goals (specific and measurable) for the team which can be both challenging and frustrating. They must learn how best to use their group efforts to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. The assumption is that teams set goals that will ultimately influence the learning process for students and teachers.

NMSA (2005) acknowledges that the work of teams

is significant and complex and that effective teams demonstrate five characteristics: (1) having a culture of discourse at their center, (2) having a clearly defined purpose and specific measurable goals, (3) being able to define and commit to norms that guide how the team operates, (4) being disciplined in maintaining their focus, and (5) communicating effectively within the team and with those outside the team” (p. 143).

A qualitative study conducted by McCammon (1992) was designed to observe the formation and development of a teacher team, to explore the connections between the teacher team and the organization which supported it, and to determine the relationship between the organizational support given to the school and the dynamics of the change process. McCammon found that those who are supposed to function as a group should have some knowledge of how groups are expected to work and have some way to evaluate their own progress as a group (p. 35). He also found that it takes times for

members of a group to learn to work together, to create group roles that facilitate the decision making process, and to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships (p. 35).

In reporting the results of the study, McCammon noted that no attention was paid to building the team, there was no clear establishment of the team's authority or responsibilities, there was no training or support provided for the teachers, and there were no leadership interventions to assist teachers shifting from the teacher as the individual to the teacher as a member of a team.

Teams in their early stages of implementation tend to focus on coordinating student assignments and tests, address student behaviors, contact parents, and plan student activities. Experienced teams do much more. They integrate curriculum, concepts, and instruction, experiment with blocks of instructional time, develop service learning projects, and plan activities to increase parent involvement (McQuaide, 1994).

Rottier (1996) reported that as teams develop, they experience four stages. The first is the "forming" stage which is a time of excitement as team members begin to bond. During this stage, unrealistic goals may be set which can result in frustration since they are unsure about the job ahead. The second stage is the "storming" stage which is characterized by low morale. People become frustrated and angry because the realities of teaming are setting in and no decision-making procedure has been established. The third stage is the "norming" stage where team members are building a sense of trust and learning how to make good decisions. The fourth stage is the "performing" stage where members know and appreciate each other and look forward to working together, even though they may not always agree. They have worked out procedures to make good decisions and resolve any conflicts.

According to Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (2000a), the length of time a middle school team has been together can improve student performance. Once teams have moved beyond the initial stages of learning how to work together, teams improve their performance as they improve their teaming practices. The assumption here is that teams that have been together for a long time share a commitment to the middle school philosophy.

Many middle schools employ a teaming approach in which a group of two to five teachers are responsible for the core instruction of 100 to 125 students. This arrangement is supposed to facilitate collaborative planning among the teachers, promote the development of interdisciplinary curricula, and enable teachers to work together over time to identify and respond to the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. According to NMSA (2005), "All high-performing teams, whether in middle schools, business, or athletics, function best when there is time to collaborate, refine practice, reflect, invent, and work together" (p. 144).

According to Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (2002),

Two of the biggest misconceptions surrounding the implementation of interdisciplinary teaming in the middle grades are that (a) the work is complete after teachers and students have been assigned to teams and the class schedule has been rearranged so that students on the same team have all their classes together (i.e., the structures are in place) and (b) the implementation of teaming ensures that a school will positively impact teacher and student outcomes. However, the truth is that not only is the most challenging work tackled after teams have been formed, but, without follow-up work, teaming is not likely to achieve sustained outcomes (p. 1).

The researcher and a number of her colleagues recognize that teaming is difficult. It requires a great deal of hard work to develop the collaborative culture of a team. It requires emerging from the safe, comfortable environment of isolation in the classroom

and exposing one's practice and beliefs to the scrutiny of one's colleague. As Johnson (1990) said,

Whatever support administrators provide, teachers themselves must ultimately take responsibility for collaboration. Teachers both constitute and create the context for collegiality. Removing the structural barriers to exchange will not alone ensure that teachers eagerly and confidently cooperate and critique each other's practice. Strong norms of autonomy and privacy prevail among teachers. Creeping fears of competition, exposure to shortcomings, and discomforting criticism often discourage open exchange, cooperation and growth. Until teachers overcome such fears and actively take charge of their own professional relations, teaching will likely remain isolating work (pp. 178-179).

Because teachers are used to working as individuals, they haven't had the opportunity to converse with others in a formal way in the context of the teaming structure. This lack of opportunity may well present a problem among team members who should have a "culture of discourse at their center" (NMSA, 2005, p. 143).

A. Teaming: Communication

When teachers are grouped to create an interdisciplinary team, a number of issues emerge that are related to personal and professional backgrounds, prior experience, self image, and in-service training. There are many variables that affect individual reactions to the teaming process: from the fear of moving from a comfortable environment to the insecurities stemming from a different philosophy of teaching and learning, melding with different colleagues, learning the nuances of a different community, and dealing with the stress of figuring out where one fits in the scheme of this process.

An important part of individual actions and reactions is one's own personal worldview. "Deeply held beliefs, values, and assumptions exert a powerful influence on our thoughts and actions which form our personal worldview. Similarly, our professional thinking is shaped by the pedagogical beliefs and assumptions that we have internalized"

(Wald & Castleberry, 2000, p. 60). This seems to be a contradiction to the notion mentioned earlier by Katzenbach and Smith that effective teamwork is not related to personality or predisposition. However, the work of developing effective communication requires understanding and acknowledgment of individually held beliefs.

On many teams, members talk “at” each other instead of talking “with” each other (Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Communication is important to the teaming process as individual members present their points of view and defend them when challenged. The team’s work is to choose the best of the ideas presented which relies on the ability of team members to talk with each other, “working together to understand and mold the group’s many ideas into a new whole” (Wald & Castleberry, 2000, p. 63). Some teams may experience members who dominate the group or conversely, members who fail to contribute, and the team may need help confronting these problems directly, either through facilitation by the principal or an outside consultant. (Pounder, 1998).

According to Fullan (1991), “Collegiality among teachers as measured by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, etc., was a strong indicator of implementation success. Virtually every research study on the topic has found that to be the case” (p. 132). For Sparks, a former Executive Director of the National Staff Development Council, “The image of the future would be a group of teachers sitting around a table talking about their student’s work, learning and asking, What do we need to do differently to get the work we would like from the kids?” (1998b, p. 19).

According to Schmoker, (1999), “People accomplish more together than in isolation; regular collective dialogue about an agreed-upon focus sustains commitment and feeds purpose; and teachers learn best from other teachers” (p. 55). However,

regularly scheduled time for middle school teams is necessary to establish communication norms and to accomplish the work of the team.

B. Teaming: Common Planning Time

"During common planning time teams manage their time, establish performance goals, and engage in curriculum coordination; coordination of student assignments, assessments, and feedback; parental contact and involvement; and contact other building resource staff" (NMSA, 2005, p. 143).

Critical to the success of an interdisciplinary team is common planning time (Warren & Muth, 1995; NMSA, 2005). Teams often use common planning time to plan and coordinate team activities such as homework, tests, and special projects. However, at a more advanced level teams coordinate and integrate curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Common planning time should not replace individual planning time because collaborative work suffers since teachers are concerned with their own workloads (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Without sufficient time to plan and reasonable conditions within which to work, even those teams considered 'good functioning' cannot accomplish their objectives, tasks, and goals (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2000a, 2000b, 2003).

According to NMSA (2003), daily common planning time is essential so that teams can plan ways to integrate curriculum, analyze test data, review student work, discuss current research, and reflect on the effectiveness of instructional approaches. NMSA (2003) recommends that concerns of individual students and day to day management details, although important, should not consume the bulk of common planning time. Crow and Pounder (2000) found that team members often use common planning time to discuss non-teaming issues, especially individual student behavior, because there is limited time during the school day for teacher interaction. However, spending common planning time discussing individual students may have unexpected

benefits. Discussion related to an individual student may provide information about the student and the student's family situation that will aid in meeting the needs of that child. Fauske and Shelble (2002) also found that teams spent about two thirds of common planning time discussing individual student behaviors, organizing non-instructional school activities, or clarifying their team tasks and roles.

Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (2003) reported that students in teams that had common planning time in addition to a teacher's individual planning period outperform students in schools without such planning time. Mertens and Flowers (2003, February) reported interdisciplinary teams with common planning times had the highest levels of team and classroom practices. Classroom practices were defined as small group, active instruction, integrated and interdisciplinary practices, and reading, writing, and math skills practices. Teachers learn more if they assess their teaching and the students' learning and use it to change instruction. Implementing assessments to measure progress toward goals and inform practice provides descriptive feedback of teaching effectiveness, while building students' confidence and resulting in adjustment to instruction (Stiggins, 2002).

According to Anfara and Lipka (2003), common planning time must be used well by all teams and all teachers must be held accountable for results. Just having the team structure does not ensure that they perform well. If teaming is only minimally implemented, teams with common planning time are not necessarily expected to meet and those teams that do meet may have no organization or agenda to give focus to the meeting. Time can also be wasted on discussion of issues that cannot be changed or have been repeatedly discussed with no resolution. Members don't always adhere to

acceptable team behavior and may arrive late and may perform other tasks (grading papers) during the meeting. These teams do not perform well and the school will not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as stipulated by the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (Brown, Roney, & Anfara, 2003). However, having common team planning time is not enough. Teams must have a purpose or goals and rules that guide how they operate to achieve those goals.

C. Teaming: Shared Vision and Team Norms

“Schools typically lack clear, common direction and communication that promotes people working toward mutually intelligible goals” (Schmoker, 1999, p.26).

Failure to establish clear goals for schooling may explain why so much apparent collaboration is futile: “Far too many teams casually accept goals that are neither demanding, precise, realistic, nor actually held in common...teamwork alone never makes a team” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 21).

Rosenholtz (1991) found that there was very little goal consensus in schools even though it was at the center of what accounted for progress and success. Without clear, common goals, teachers are not able to determine how to improve or determine if they are improving. Clearly written goals “promote rational planning and action as well as clear criteria by which performance can be evaluated” (Rosenholtz, 1991, p. 13). When clear goals are absent, schools become “nothing more than collections of independent teachers, each marching to the step of a different pedagogical drum” (Rosenholtz, 1991, p. 26).

According to Glickman (1993), schools and teams tend to set goals such as use cooperative learning, portfolio development, and assessment of learning styles. When he

asked the faculty at twenty-one schools that were instituting a goal-oriented approach for school improvement how progress was determined, the response was that success was gauged on whether the innovation had been implemented rather than by whether or not students had learned (p. 49). Glickman stated that the “litmus test for a good school is not its innovations but rather the solid, purposeful, enduring results it tries to obtain for its students” (p. 50).

Schmoker (1999) suggested that “Goals must be measurable, focused on student achievement, and linked to effective assessments” (p. 31) and warned that taking on too many goals did not allow for the necessary time for planning, training, and constructive dialogue.

Maeroff (1993) reported that effective teams are motivated and energized by “a clear, elevating goal and a results-driven structure” (p. 515). Based on the studies of Maeroff (1994), Darling-Hammond (1998), and the United States Department of Education (1998), Schmoker (1999) reported “The lack of clear goals may provide the most credible explanation for why we are still inching along in our effort to improve schooling for U.S. children and why the results of more than 15 years of reform have been so disappointing” (1999, p. 23).

Middle schools that have the organizational structures such as interdisciplinary teams and common planning time in place require educators who are knowledgeable about and believe in the middle school concept to implement the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

III. Knowledgeable Educators

Successful middle school teachers value working with young adolescents but must be prepared to do so. "Teachers need access to preparation programs that provide them with specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be highly accomplished in their practice" (NMSA, 2005, p. 17).

Although Johnson (1990) implied that teachers are responsible for collaboration, they cannot do this alone. Unless teachers come from a middle level teacher education program or are provided extensive professional development in middle level education, they are typically unfamiliar with the complexities of the teaming concept (Juvonen, et al., 2004). Doda and Thompson (2002) described teacher preparation this way,

Professional development initiatives have far too often been about enticing teachers to use models, means, and methods without inviting them into an examination of the critical philosophical beliefs and assumptions that give those practices educational leverage and value. As a result, some middle schools have remained merely junior high schools with flair (p. 349).

Many middle level educators are the product of elementary or secondary-level teacher preparation programs (Juvonen, et al., 2004). Elementary teachers are typically familiar with the responsibility of teaching core subjects to one group of students within the confines of a self-contained classroom. Secondary teachers are familiar with teaching a particular academic subject to five or more distinct groups of students. In all likelihood, neither has been directly exposed to the concept of middle school teaming. According to Juvonen, et al. (2004), many middle school teachers do not have a major, minor, or certification in the subjects they teach or training in the development of young adolescents. Thus they may not understand the developmental needs of young adolescents or the instructional practices advocated for today's middle schools. Without specialized middle school training, they are unfamiliar with effective approaches to

promote adolescents' social, emotional, physical, and intellectual growth (Juvonen, et al., 2004; Lipsitz, Jackson, & Austin, 1997).

Unfortunately, most middle school teachers do not receive specialized training as part of their preservice education and certification (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2002). Many who elect to teach at the middle level are dedicated to teaching young adolescents. One would hope that these dedicated educators are well-equipped with the specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be successful in teaching this challenging age group of ten to fifteen year olds. However, this is not necessarily the case, since many of these teachers have received little or no specialized professional preparation for teaching young adolescents (NMSA, 2005).

Experts in the field of middle level education not only recommend that middle grades be staffed with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents but further support and advocate for middle grades teacher preparation programs and specialized teacher training (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2002). Further support and advocacy for middle school teacher preparation and specialized teacher training come from several professional organizations (NMSA, 1991; Cooney, 2000; National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2002). There is also increasing support from middle level teachers for comprehensive, specialized middle level teacher preparation (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Jackson, Andrews, Holland & Pardini, 2004; McEwin, Dickinson, & Smith, 2004; National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2002; NMSA, 2003).

It may be that teacher preparation programs are slow in implementing the NMSA middle level teacher preparations standards (approved by the National Council for

Accreditation of Teacher Education–NCATE) that include components unique to the middle level program (NMSA, 2003).

Under the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, all teachers must be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year. To be “highly qualified,” a teacher must hold a bachelor’s degree, hold a certification or licensure to teach in the state of his/her employment, and have proven knowledge of the subjects he/she teaches (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). However, this seems confounding with regard to middle school teaming and may have an unexpected consequence on teaming. With the *No Child Left Behind* focus on content knowledge and academic achievement outcomes, time and resources may be taken away from the education and training necessary for teaming and the developmental needs of children might be ignored. In other words, time and money spent on getting teachers highly qualified in content areas and a focus on testing students drains resources necessary to create a successful middle school.

According to the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS), specialized preparation of middle grades teachers will produce caring teachers, competent in subject-matter, who are well qualified to teach young adolescents (NELMS, 2005). Only within the last few years have institutions of higher learning and state certification boards recognized and begun to address this issue.

Whether educators have had formal middle school preparation or not, middle school teams are given the responsibility and are empowered to make decisions regarding curriculum and instruction. However, even if teachers are well-versed in subject-matter content, they may not be well-versed in middle school curriculum and instruction.

IV. Curriculum and Instruction

A major programmatic feature of a successful middle school is a curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory (NMSA, 2005). Curriculum is “relevant when it allows students to pursue questions they have about themselves, content, and the world”; challenging when it “addresses substantive issues and skills and is geared to (students’) levels of understanding”; integrated when students “explore their own agendas within a curriculum that defies subject area boundaries”; and exploratory when “it enables students to investigate beyond their immediate realm” (NMSA, 2005, pp. 103-105)

Curriculum and instruction are first addressed generally and then flexible scheduling, assessment and evaluation, and multiple teaching and learning approaches are specifically considered because NMSA (2005) considers them integral components to curriculum and instruction.

Although curriculum is commonly perceived as being related to specific content within a given discipline such as science, mathematics, art, or music, it also includes school-wide programs and services such as guidance support services, clubs, drama programs, and sports. From the inception of the middle school concept, a common rationale in making curricula decisions has been a strong emphasis on educational methods that complement the “unique characteristics and needs of young adolescents” (NMSA, 2003, p. 3). However, “Our search for the composition of that curriculum has seemed inevitably reduced to discussions and proposals within ‘disciplines vs. interdisciplinary’ or ‘subject specific vs. integrated’ dualities” (NMSA, 2005, p. 98).

Bishop and Pflaum (2005a, 2005b), after interviewing middle school students in six schools, found that relevance in curriculum played a critical role in engaging students in their learning process which in turn, increased achievement. It would seem this kind of engagement and achievement evidence would bring about development of curriculum in relation to the learner. “If our focus is truly on young adolescent learners, then we will

emphasize *their* challenging and being challenged by their schoolwork, *their* successfully integrating new learning into their continuously modified existing knowledge, and *their* exploring the ideas and questions that interest them (NMSA, 2005, p. 107). However, this is not the reality of current middle school curriculum which remains subject-matter centered with occasional attempts at cross discipline thematic teaching.

When an interdisciplinary team can agree upon its goals and tasks, its members can work together to influence curriculum and instruction (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2000a). Although NMSA supports a curriculum that is integrative, Weilbacher (2000) found that educators who have advocated for curriculum integration have reduced or abandoned their commitment to the integrative approach due, in part, to emphasis on mandated standards enforced by high-stakes testing. A number of curriculum theorists have argued that three sources should be considered when designing and justifying educational programs: psychological (learner and learning theory), sociological (social realities and the structure of knowledge), and philosophical (purposes and values) and that all three must be kept in balance (Vars, 2000b).

Changing instructional structures and strategies means that teachers would use instructional strategies such as inquiry-based learning, problems that have real world value, and exploratory programs that focus on making a difference in student learning. In the classroom, this would require small collaborative student groupings with supportive adults available to monitor individual student progress and provide extra support to students when needed (Cooney, 2000; George & Aronson, 2003; National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 1997; NMSA, 2002). Jackson and Davis

(2000) and Wenglinsky (2000) reported that substantial changes in teacher practices, classroom instruction, and assessment produced improved student performance.

Federal injunctions contained in the *No Child Left Behind Act* “easily intimidate many administrators, if not most teachers, from deviating from assumed deductive, prescriptive teaching, and textbook-centered modes of instruction that have long proved inadequate and inappropriate to the experienced observer of young adolescents’ learning and healthy development” (NMSA, 2005, p. 111). School schedules have traditionally consisted of fixed length periods of time and homogeneous grouping of students for instruction. However, to meet the diverse needs of the young adolescent in the middle school, longer blocks of time are needed for instruction as well as heterogeneous grouping of students to meet their social and emotional needs.

A. Curriculum and Instruction: Flexible Scheduling

“Since teams have a large block of time with their students, teachers are able to adjust and rearrange the instructional time as they see necessary in order to achieve the team’s instructional goals” (NMSA, 2005, p. 149).

Flexible scheduling requires alterations in the “school day schedule from several equally divided periods to a format that provides fewer, but longer flexible periods” (Brown, 2001, p. 129). Some middle schools use block schedules where class periods are longer than traditional fixed length periods and which meet every other day. However, these longer class periods are still of fixed length, usually 60 to 90 minutes and are often difficult to adjust when students or teachers require more instructional time. Activities that emphasize problem-solving and critical thinking require more time than a traditional fixed length period can accommodate. Extended class periods give students time to make connections across disciplines and allow more opportunities for interaction among

students and between students and teachers, which can improve interpersonal relationships (Beane, 1993; NMSA, 1995). If teachers are still using traditional curriculum formats, they do not necessarily recognize a need for implementing block scheduling.

Rettig and Canady (2000) reported that flexible scheduling might be the least implemented recommendation of middle schools. Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, and Petzko (2002) reported that the traditional fixed length period format is the most commonly used standard for middle schools. This may explain difficulty in finding studies related to flexible scheduling and the effects flexible scheduling have on student performance at this level.

B. Curriculum and Instruction: Assessment and Evaluation

To provide evidence of every child's learning progress, NMSA (2003) advocates for continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures. "Such information helps students, teachers, and family members select immediate learning goals and plan further education. Grades alone are inadequate expressions for assessing and reporting student progress on the many goals of middle school education" (p. 27).

Increased attention on student achievement has been the result of criticism directed at middle schools for being academically undemanding (Carnegie, 1989; Jackson & Davis, 2000). Poor performance on international tests in mathematics and science, poor test scores on national tests and state assessments has been the evidence used to stress that middle school education needs to be more challenging. However, understanding what a student knows cannot be based on one single test and with the advent of *No Child Left Behind*, high-stakes testing presents a dilemma for middle schools that use multiple assessment and evaluation measures to understand what a child knows and is able to do.

According to George (2002), “Goals and results in the *No Child Left Behind* are limited to cognitive achievement as measured by standardized tests. Middle level leaders will need to supplement test data with other evidence of student achievement and growth that matches the full range of goals and expectations for young adolescents” (pp. 7-8).

In a time of increased accountability to meet the challenges of *No Child Left Behind*, it would seem that middle school educators are hindered in reaching the goal of continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures. Darling-Hammond (2004) stated,

NCLB’s regulations have caused a number of schools to abandon their thoughtful diagnostic assessment and accountability systems – replacing instructionally rich, improvement-oriented systems with more rote-oriented punishment-driven approaches – and it has thrown many high-performing and steadily improving schools into chaos rather than helping them remain focused and deliberate in their ongoing efforts to serve students well (pp. 4-5).

According to Arhar (2003) there is a major difference between the vision of education advocated through the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 and the vision of education advocated by NMSA (2005) and *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000). “One vision (NCLB) emphasizes accountability through standardized testing and parental choice and the other emphasizes becoming involved in helping children learn” (NMSA, 2005, p. 130).

Pate (2004) stated that appropriate and developmentally responsive assessment is an integral part of middle school education. He further added, “Employing a variety of assessment practices will help ensure that teachers capture student learning, for no single method can possibly encapsulate all that students have learned” (p. 73). Teachers who continue to use a traditional curriculum format may not see a need to change their traditional forms of assessment and evaluation of student work. Even teachers who may

see a need to use multiple assessment and evaluations may elect to continue using traditional assessment and evaluation measures in light of the accountability requirements of NCLB.

Some middle schools, realizing that many students receive failing grades, have instituted the ABCI grading program. The ABCI program is a component of Middle Start, a comprehensive school improvement program for middle schools and for schools with middle grades (Kenkel, Hoelscher, & West, 2006). Under this approach, students are required to receive a grade of C or higher on every form of assessment. If the quality of student work is judged to be less than C quality, the student receives an I for Incomplete. Teachers then give the student as much time and support as necessary to complete the work and receive a higher grade. A goal of the ABCI program is for teachers to reflect on the kinds of assignments given to students and to reflect on whether or not teachers' instructional practices and assessment methods are appropriate for young adolescents (Kenkel, Hoelscher, & West, 2006). The Kenkel, Hoelscher, and West (2006) study reported that under the ABCI approach, that discipline issues decreased, that students were more engaged in classroom activities, and performance data indicated that the ABCI program may have improved students' performance on state assessments.

C. Curriculum and Instruction: Multiple Teaching and Learning Approaches

"Developmentally responsive approaches to teaching and learning that respond to the diversity among today's young adolescents include strategies that address student diversity within a heterogeneous classroom" (NMSA, 2005, pp. 113-114).

Traditional approaches thought to increase student achievement have reemerged to address the issue of increased accountability and improved test scores, heightened by the provisions of NCLB, since the early 1990s. However, according to Jackson and

Davis (2000), it is substantial changes in teachers' practices, classroom instruction, and assessment that produce improved student performance. Mertens and Flowers (2003), in a study of 102 schools, concluded that socioeconomic status was more highly associated with student achievement than classroom practices and teaming practices; a contradiction to the Jackson and Davis report.

Tomlinson (2001) suggested that teachers should address diversity in the classroom through differentiated curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Differentiation, as defined by Tomlinson, is the recognition, articulation, and commitment to plan for student differences within the heterogeneous (mixed ability) classroom. Tomlinson's philosophy of differentiation is consistent with the NMSA (2005) recommendations for appropriate middle school curriculum and instruction. However, Moon, Brighton, and Callahan (2003) found that the instructional practices of many middle school teachers do not reflect a responsiveness to the diversity of student needs. Moon, et al., (2003) found that middle school teachers' classroom practices often reflect the traditional pedagogy practiced when schools were less diverse; that lecture and skill practice remain the most common method of instruction. This study confirmed the 1993 National Middle School Study (McEwin, Dickinson, & Smith, 1996) that approximately 90% of middle school teachers use direct instruction regularly. According to Moon, et al., (2003), the recent focus on high-stakes testing has only reinforced the use of traditional pedagogy thus decreasing the use of strategies focused on problem-solving and enrichment while increasing the use of test preparation materials.

In spite of the increasing diversity in middle school classrooms and in response to the pressure of high-stakes testing, traditional classroom practices and beliefs still prevail

in middle school classrooms. "The reality for students in contemporary middle schools is likely to be predictable, teacher-directed instruction with few, if any, accommodations for students' learning preferences, academic differences, or interests" (Brighton & Hertberg, 2004, p. 3).

V. Adult Advocate

Successful middle schools are characterized by "an adult advocate for every student who is knowledgeable about young adolescent development, who self-evidently enjoys working with young adolescents and who comes to know the students well as individuals" (NMSA, 2005, p. 64).

This responsibility is often addressed by instituting an advisory program designed to meet the affective needs of the child while supporting academic development.

An advisory program is one in which one adult and a small (ideally 10 to 12) group of students have the opportunity to meet on a regularly scheduled basis in order to provide a caring environment for academic guidance and support, everyday administrative details, recognition, and activities to promote citizenship (NMSA, 1996). The heart of a successful advisory program is the development of a trustful, caring community in which students perceive their advisor as demonstrating unconditional support for their growth (Knowles & Brown, 2000, p. 154).

For advisor-advisee relationships to grow, the school schedule must allow time for the advisory groups to meet on a regular basis. Effective advisory programs increase student achievement, promote student-teacher relationships, address general self-esteem and confidence beliefs, link parents with the school, and mediate between academic and social concerns (Camblin, 2003; Cooney, 2000). Evidence suggests that students who have positive relationships with their teachers are more likely to achieve academically than those who do not (Anfara, 2003; Dilg, 2003).

Although not all advisory programs have the same objectives, most aim to form small groups of students and provide them with individual attention (Anfara & Brown, 2001). Even though advisory programs are not intended to affect student achievement directly, “If we embrace advisory as a powerful way to enhance our efforts to reach and teach our young people, then affect and achievement become codependent and no middle school should be without it” (Doda, 2003, p. 21).

Young adolescents need to know that those who educate them not only care about them but are also concerned with their social, emotional, and academic progress. This can be accomplished through an advisory program. “And yet, some schools that initiated advisory programs over the past three decades lost sight of this concern. Too many programs have floundered because advisory was seen as a curriculum to be covered rather than a relationship to be nurtured” (NMSA, 2005, p. 68). Knowles and Brown (2000) stated that “advisors must be willing to develop a relationship with students different from the one they experience as a regular classroom teacher – one characterized by caring, not authoritarianism” (p. 153). However, Ayres (1994) reported that teachers remain uncommitted because of inadequate preparation, fear, and lack of experience.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York emphasized “When students make a lasting connection with at least one caring adult, academic and personal outcomes improve. When it is well implemented, our sense is that the advisory can be effective in developing relationships that support learning” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 143).

Although there is literature related to advisory programs, there has not been extensive research that examines the experiences of students and teachers participating in these programs. Anfara and Brown (2001) conducted qualitative research to explore the

teacher perspective of advisory programs. In the study, teachers reported that caring was “women’s work,” that “battle lines” were drawn when administrators withdrew or withheld the necessary support from advisory teachers, and that a fine line exists between mingling and meddling in the lives of young adolescents. Although an adult advocate at the school level is deemed essential for student growth and development by NMSA (2005) standards, parental involvement and community involvement are equally important.

VI. School-Initiated Family and Community Partnerships and Parent Contact

According to NMSA (2003), too many parents become less involved in school when their children reach middle school. Parents feel that their children need less support at the middle level and many are often unaware of how they can be involved in this new phase of their child’s education. NMSA (2003) stated “Research studies clearly link the involvement of both family and other adults in the community with high levels of student achievement, improved student behavior, and greater overall support for schools” (p. 18).

During the middle school years parental involvement in school decreases. Giving a child more responsibility and allowing the child more independence have been frequent explanations for this decrease in parental involvement. However, Mulhall, Mertens, and Flowers (2001) found that most parents are not very knowledgeable about middle school practice. Thus, successful middle schools will promote family involvement by sponsoring parent education programs, creating and maintaining links between home and school, initiating volunteer programs, establishing coordinated home-school learning

experiences, and developing activities that involve community businesses and various cultural and civic groups (NMSA, 2003).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) in reviewing fifty-one studies found that the effects of parental involvement on student achievement were positive. They concluded that “Taken as a whole, these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including academic achievement” (p. 24).

Juvonen, et al. (2004) found that “although parental involvement is not necessarily sufficient to bring about academic success, its absence may increase the risk of school difficulties” (p. 97). That middle schools do less than elementary schools to involve parents was another finding in their review. Their recommendation is that middle schools ensure that all parents receive factual information regarding the school’s goals and practices and that middle schools experiment with different types of activities and supports to foster better communication between home and school.

Camblin (2003) stated that students are much more likely to be successful when families and parents are seen by schools as having the ability to contribute in a positive way to their children’s education. Camblin further added “Students have less need to negotiate between two different cultural contexts. Viewing the family as a source of support and building on their interest in school and their desire to see their children succeed could make all the difference” (p. 6). Although family support and involvement in the life of the middle school child are important, the school environment must provide a learning environment that is supportive and safe.

VII. Safe Environment, Health, Wellness, and Safety

“Successful schools for young adolescents are universally characterized by a culture that is inviting, supportive and safe” (NMSA, 2005, p. 35)

In a developmentally responsive middle school, “an emphasis on health, wellness, and safety permeates the entire school, with faculty members sharing responsibility for maintaining a positive school environment” (NMSA, 2005, p. 153).

A healthy school environment, one that is inviting, supportive, and safe enhances human relationships. In fact, teachers in schools that have interdisciplinary teaming have a more positive school climate, engage in more frequent contact with parents, have higher job satisfaction among teachers, and report higher student achievement scores than non-teaming schools (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2000a).

Several studies have found a strong correlation between victimization and psychological distress (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001; Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Juvonen, Nishina & Graham, 2001). Much of this research focuses on more prevalent forms of hostility such as bullying and antisocial behavior (Nansel, et al., 2001). Feelings of distress associated with bullying experiences predict lower grades and higher rates of absenteeism among middle school students (Juvonen, Nishina, and Graham, 2001). However, bullying is not the only behavior attributed to an unhealthy school climate. Robbery and physical attack negatively affect the school climate as well (Juvonen, et al., 2004). More recently, the increase of gun violence in middle schools has certainly affected the school climate negatively.

Using National Household Education Survey (NHES) data, Chandler, Nolan, and Davies (1995) concluded that “Students who must think about avoiding harm at school are diverting energy that should be expended on learning. Improving students’ safety at school will enable American youth to redirect their concerns to school work and student

activities” (p. 3). In 2001, data from the NHES showed that “12- to 18-year old students reported being more afraid of being attacked at school or on their way to and from school than away from school” (Juvonen, et al., 2004, p. 52).

Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, and Dumas (2003) found that differences in student perceptions of safety problems affected levels of depression and academic outcomes for middle school students. Programs that change the social norms of schools such as anti-bullying programs, improve student psychological well-being (Rigby, 2001).

Proactive efforts to change the peer culture of schools by raising the consciousness and social responsibility of the students may both decrease problem behavior and improve perceptions of support (Juvonen, et al., 2004). To change the social norms in the peer culture that fosters antisocial behavior “technical assistance and professional development that help middle school teachers and principals implement such programs are needed” (Juvonen, et al., 2004, p. 62).

Children come to school every day with a broad range of needs, some more critical than others. Those children who come to school with health issues or who do not feel safe cannot focus their attention on learning (NMSA, 2005). “School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students. But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge” (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2004, p. 1).

Studies have shown that poor nutrition and at-risk behaviors of young adolescents can result in low achievement scores, can have lasting effects on cognitive development and school performance, can lead to behavioral problems, and can cause higher absentee rates (Parker, 1989; Center on Hunger, Poverty, and Nutrition Policy, 1995; U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). School guidance personnel as well as other school and community support services such as anger management groups, mentoring programs, and the Big Brother/Big Sister organizations can help.

Multifaceted Guidance and Support Services

Guidance and support services provide proactive programs, personnel, and services to meet the social and emotional needs of the young adolescent (NMSA, 2005, p. 165)

Middle school philosophy supports an adult advocate for every student, one who knows the student well. This adult knows the student well enough to know whether or not the student needs further guidance or services (NMSA, 2003). While some schools are providing guidance and support systems, other schools are struggling to keep the guidance personnel and services they have.

With the implementation of No Child Left Behind,

Counselors and teachers are pressured to leave behind the social and emotional needs of the students, concentrating instead on those core curricula areas that are always tested. Preparation for the testing process, increased data collection, and administrative paperwork take time that guidance personnel formerly spent teaching students how to make decisions, how to study, how to communicate, how to get along with others, how to transition to new schools, how to avoid drugs and alcohol, how to resolve conflicts, and how to develop their talents (NMSA, 2005, p. 171).

Summary

Educators are ultimately responsible for educating students. In the teaming configuration of the middle school model, teachers functioning in a collaborative group are asked to have the power, the knowledge, the expertise, and the dispositions to make decisions regarding the best way to help students learn. Teachers are expected to be knowledgeable about the most current and well researched information on the teaching/learning process.

While many educators have learned to see children from different perspectives, noting and accommodating their learning styles, their levels, their areas of vulnerability and resilience, most of us have not thought to extend that vision to other adults. It is as though once people are old enough to be teachers, they are fully formed or finished” (Levine, 1995, Foreword).

What educators are expected to apply for student learners must be recognized and applied to adult learners in this process for adults are never ‘fully formed or finished’ (Levine, 1995). Adults change throughout their adult years as their individual needs change and as their environment changes. Thus in the context of the school setting, it is important to examine adults as individuals who have different belief systems and what the implications might be for interdisciplinary teaming.

The history of middle school has shown that the middle school concept has been defined and redefined. Recommendations have been interpreted differently and implemented in varying degrees over the years. However, the most recent NMSA recommendations for a successful middle school include specific elements that must be in place and interdependent to create a total ecology of schooling. NMSA (2005) has recommended the following elements:

Cultural Characteristics

High Expectations	Courageous, Collaborative Leadership	Active Learning
Adult Advocate	School-Initiated Partnerships	Shared Vision
Safe Environment	Knowledgeable Educators	

School Practices

Organizational Structures	Assessment and Evaluation
Multiple Learning and Teaching Approaches	Health, Wellness, and Safety
Relevant, Challenging, Integrative, Exploratory Curriculum	Guidance and Support

The literature related to teacher beliefs indicates that teachers hold individual beliefs that have been internalized through their individual experiences. One would

hypothesize that teachers hold individual beliefs about the NMSA (2005) elements and question if their individual beliefs can be translated to the team setting. One would also hypothesize that collaborative leadership with a visionary principal would increase the likelihood that the elements are more likely to be implemented. If teachers hold individual beliefs about the NMSA (2005) elements for a successful middle school, does the work of the team reflect those beliefs?

This qualitative study investigates how the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings reflects team member beliefs regarding middle school and the school practices and cultural characteristics recommended by the NMSA (2005).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the following: the site of the study and the population studied, research design, instrumentation development, data collection procedures, reliability and verification of the instruments, methods of data analysis, and study limitations.

The purpose of the study was to investigate how the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings reflects team member beliefs regarding middle school and the school practices and cultural characteristics recommended by the NMSA (2005).

The Site of the Study and the Population Studied

Site of the Study

The site of this study is a small suburban 6-8 grades middle school located in Northern New England.

The School Administrative Unit (SAU) serves the citizens of three local area towns and provides school services for approximately 2,300 students who are housed in one elementary school, two schools with grades 1-8, one middle school, and one high school. The middle school has a student population of approximately 250 in grades six, seven, and eight, all of whom reside in the town where the school is located.

The goal of the school district is “to improve student achievement for all students and make our schools the center of learning for children, parents, citizens, teachers, and

school staff guided by student performance, community engagement, and team leadership” (School District document). The middle school’s mission statement is “ Olde Town Middle School fosters the development of well-educated citizens in a nurturing learning environment. The school encourages students to meet life’s choices and challenges with intellectual curiosity, civic responsibility, and personal integrity” (Middle School handbook).

The site was chosen because the school has begun to implement the NMSA recommendations for a successful middle school. In the 2005-06 school year, the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) was scheduled to provide ongoing support and guidance to the school community during this implementation phase, primarily to the interdisciplinary teams. The school district made a three year plan with NELMS for ongoing support. The principal gave all school personnel a copy of *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (NMSA, 2003) with the expectation that they would read it. As the principal said at the start, “We are a middle school in name only. We have a long way to go” (field notes).

The middle school is housed in two physical structures with the construction of a new middle school expected to be complete in two years. The middle and high school students are in one building with the high school students located on the first floor while seventh and eighth grade students are housed on the second floor. The sixth grade students are housed in an elementary school adjacent to the middle-high school because of limited physical space. The sixth grade students must travel outside to the middle-high school for some classes such as physical education, study hall, some reading classes, and lunch.

Gaining Entry

In discussing research design and methodology, Maxwell (1996) wrote, “The research relationship you establish can facilitate or hinder other components of the research design such as sampling and data collection methods” (p. 67). Maxwell also wrote that it is important to think about the relationship the researcher wants to have with participants in the study and what needs to be done to establish this relationship.

In terms of the research relationship, the researcher remained a neutral interviewer and non-participant observer. The researcher was in the school almost daily for five months so participants felt comfortable with the presence of the researcher. Creswell (1998) recommends that initially the researcher should determine a role as an observer. This role can change over time “from that of a complete participant (going native) to that of a complete observer. I especially like the procedure of being an outsider initially followed by becoming an insider over time” (Creswell, 1998, p. 125). In this study, the researcher developed a relationship somewhere in between these two extremes using a formal approach initially while being sensitive to the chain of command within the school district.

Gaining entry to the site for this study proved to be a much longer process than had been anticipated. Table 1 summarizes the timeline required to gain entry to the site for this study.

Table 1
Study Timeline to Gain Entry

Contact Person	Date	Reason for Contact
School Superintendent	April 2005	Gain approval from the School Board; School Board Approval: mid-May
Principal	May 2005	Approval to conduct the study and meet with the teams
Principal	August 2005	Gain entry to Team Leader meeting
Team Leader Meeting	September 8, 2005	Present Proposal and Gain Entry to Each Team
Grade 6 Team	September 16, 2005	Present Proposal, Answer Questions Informed Consent Forms were signed
Grade 7 Team	September 20, 2005	Present Proposal, Answer Questions Informed Consent Forms were signed
Grade 8 Team	October 3, 2005	Present Proposal, Answer Questions Informed Consent Forms signed 2 weeks later

The first contact person was the school district superintendent. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, what the study would entail, and how the results of the study might be helpful to the school district. Individual team members and teams would not be identified explicitly in any results provided to the school district. The school district superintendent agreed to present the research proposal to the school board for its approval. Following approval of the school board, permission to contact the middle school principal was granted.

The second contact person was the school principal who would grant permission for the study only if all teams gave their permission. The researcher's original request was to meet with each team prior to the end of the school year in June 2005. Because the school was in the final stages of the school accreditation process, the principal suggested

meeting the teams in the fall of 2005 once school resumed. This explains the long period of 'no contact' from May to August 2005.

The principal's approval provided entry to a team leader meeting at which team leaders agreed to discuss the research proposal with their team members. Team leaders provided entry to individual team meetings where approval of the study was granted by all team members. The teachers agreed to complete a personal/professional questionnaire, to be interviewed by the researcher, and to allow the researcher to observe and audio tape team meetings.

Population

Personal data collected through the questionnaires (see Appendix A) revealed information regarding team composition.

The population studied was twelve teachers serving on three interdisciplinary teaching teams; one team in each of the grade levels six through eight and an additional teacher (male) who serves as a member on all three teams.

Table 2
Teams by Grade Level, Subject Area, and Gender

	Mathematics	Science	History	Language Arts
Grade 6	Female	Male	Female	Female
Grade 7	Female	Female	Male	Female
Grade 8	Female	Female	Male	Female

The sixth grade team has been together for more than five years and consists of three female teachers and one male teacher. Three of the four teachers hold K-8 certifications. One teacher holds secondary-school certification. Three team members

are over fifty years of age and one team member is between the ages of forty-one and fifty. Teaching is a second career for all of the sixth grade team members. Years of teaching experience ranges from eleven to thirty-three.

The seventh grade team has been together for fewer than five years and consists of three female teachers and one male teacher. These teachers also hold K-8 or secondary-school certifications. Two team members are between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-five, one team member is over fifty years old, and one team member is under twenty-five years of age. All seventh grade team members entered the teaching profession directly out of college. The oldest team member left the teaching profession for several years but returned eleven years ago. Years of teaching experience for three of the team members ranges from seven to seventeen while the fourth team member is a first year teacher.

The eighth grade team has been together for more than five years and consists of three female teachers and one male teacher. All of the eighth grade team members hold secondary-school certifications. Three team members are between the ages of forty-one and fifty while the fourth team member is over fifty years of age. Teaching is a second career for one eighth grade team member. Years of teaching experience ranges from seventeen to thirty-two years.

With the exception of the first year teacher and one seventh grade teacher who has seven years of teaching experience, these teachers have had more than ten years of teaching experience and are considered veteran teachers. None of the team members has had formal preparation or in-service training for middle school.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Interviews

The purpose of the interview was to uncover individual teacher beliefs about the middle school concept and their role within the school. "The standardized open-ended interview involves a predetermined sequence and wording of the same set of questions to be asked of each respondent in order to minimize the possibility of bias" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 310) allowing the interviewee to take any direction he/she wants.

For this study content for the interview questions was taken from professional reading and the researcher's personal experiences. The interview questions were written in alignment with the National Middle School Association (2005) recommendations and were designed to be standardized but open-ended so as to allow the interviewee to tell his/her own story. Maxwell (1996) strongly recommends that interview questions be pilot-tested with people as much like one's planned participants as possible to determine if the participants understand the questions exactly as the researcher intended and to determine what revisions may be necessary in order to clarify the particular concept and construct intended by the researcher. This corresponds to Yin's (1989) notion of construct validity as the extent to which a measure used in a case study correctly operationalizes the concepts being studied.

The first draft of the interview questions was pilot-tested with three teachers who were currently middle school teachers on interdisciplinary teams; one teacher at each of the grade levels six through eight. The pilot test was to make sure that the questions would provide the data to answer the research question (Maxwell, 1996). Using suggestions from these three teachers, several interview questions were modified mainly

to clarify the intent of the question. For example, “Tell me what interdisciplinary teaming means to you” was modified to “What is your definition of interdisciplinary teaming?” A need to change this question became apparent during the pilot test when participants gave responses that indicated that they interpreted the question as what interdisciplinary teaming **should** mean to them. Several interview questions were modified and were pilot-tested again with the same three teachers. The results of this pilot test revealed that all participants shared the same understanding of the questions.

According to Yin (1989) and Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), evidence that participants share the same understanding of the questions establishes construct validity. These modified interview questions (Appendix B) were used in the current study. Reliability of the interview instrument was established through data obtained in the interviews.

Individual teachers often expressed their beliefs in several different ways during the interview. For example, one participant expressed her belief about how the team functioned in her responses to several different questions: “We rarely see things unanimously anymore.” “some of us don’t get heard,” and “some of us get overruled.” In many instances, team members confirmed the beliefs of each other during the interviews. For example, one teacher stated that team meetings were chaotic which was also stated by the other teachers on the same team during their interviews. Different beliefs of individual teachers were also reflected in the interview data. For example, the advisory program was considered valuable by one team member but other team members did not believe the program was valuable. During the interviews, team members referred to other team members and their different beliefs about the advisory program.

The researcher has confidence in the reliability of the interview instrument although it was not the strict triangulation of data that Gall, Borg, and Gall ((1996) recommend. Because of time constraints of the participants and the sensitivity of the researcher to the concerns of the participants with regard to the amount of time required of them, conducting member checks was not feasible. Individual beliefs espoused in the interviews were corroborated in the parallel-item questionnaire responses with few exceptions (see Chapter IV).

During the month of December, all participants in the study were interviewed during the school day at their convenience in an empty classroom. All participants were interviewed separately by the researcher who used the same set of predetermined questions with each participant per the protocol recommendation of Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996):

- Assure respondents of absolute confidentiality before beginning the interview: The researcher accomplished this when participants agreed to participate in the study.
- Build rapport by engaging in small talk before beginning the interview: The researcher thanked participants for taking their valuable time to be interviewed and how appreciative the researcher was of their willingness to participate in the study.
- Explain the potential benefits of the study to respondents: The researcher accomplished this when participants agreed to participate in the study.
- Pose questions in language that is clear and meaningful to the respondent: The researcher used the same set of predetermined interview questions with all participants.
- The interviewer should talk less than the respondent: The researcher asked the questions from the interview guide only.
- Use simple probes when appropriate: The researcher did not use probes and did not prompt respondents when there were pauses in their responses.
- Avoid contradicting or appearing to cross-examine the respondent: The researcher did not talk during the interviews except to ask the predetermined questions or to repeat a question.
- Do not hint either by specific comment, tone of voice, or nonverbal cues at preferred or expected responses to a particular question: The researcher did not prompt participants and asked the interview questions in the same professional manner with all participants.
- Avoid leading questions: No leading questions were asked by the researcher.

These recommendations yield the highest quality of data. All interviews were audio taped and lasted, on average, one hour.

Teacher Personal/Professional Questionnaire (see Appendix A)

The questionnaire in qualitative research can be used to collect demographic data such as age, number of years teaching experience, and teaching credentials. It can also be used successfully to collect self-report data about attitudes toward working conditions such as school climate and teaming (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). In this study, the personal/professional questionnaire, originally developed for a pilot study (Cronin, 2000) on middle school teaming, was used for both purposes as follows:

The questionnaire consisted of five parts:

- Part one was designed to collect demographic data from the participants; age, gender, certification, formal education, and teaching experience and in what settings.
- Part two was designed to collect data related to how participants entered the teaching profession and to collect data, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” regarding one’s attitude toward his/her current teaching environment.
- Part three addressed individual teacher beliefs concerning influence patterns about issues regarding school policies.
- Part four addressed the organizational structure of the school.
- Part five was designed to collect information regarding the participant’s perception of his/her current teaming situation using statements that were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

The nature of the personal/professional questionnaire was consistent with the recommendations of Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) that a questionnaire that measures attitudes generally must be constructed as an attitude scale and must use a large number (at least ten) of items in order to obtain a reliable assessment of the individual’s attitude.

The personal/professional questionnaire contained forty-five items using a five-point Likert scale.

Part one and a portion of part two were developed by the researcher. The remainder of part two was adapted from a Survey of Graduates developed by a team of five faculty members at the University of New Hampshire. The Survey of Graduates was field tested, reviewed, and modified (Andrew & Schwab, 1995). A study of teacher education programs was conducted in which the Survey of Graduates was distributed to a random sample of graduates of teacher education programs from the years 1985 to 1990 of eleven institutions (Andrew & Schwab, 1995). Reliability on a previous version of the instrument on parallel items reported strong internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) within three factors and intercorrelations among the three factors ranged from .80 to .87, suggesting the possibility of a global measure of self-reported teacher effectiveness rather than three separate constructs (Barton, Andrew, & Schwab, 1994). The researcher decided to use one segment of the instrument which had established psychometric properties rather than construct a new set of questions to measure the same dimensions.

Parts three, four, and five were adapted from a questionnaire developed for a study conducted by Molnar (1971) which included teachers on seventeen teams in six middle schools. The questionnaire was related to school climate and aimed at teachers about middle school climate. Six team meetings were observed for each of the seventeen teams. Strong relationships were established between the observations and the questionnaire responses. Therefore, in this study, the researcher felt confident in adapting questions from the questionnaire.

For the current study, questions were added to ensure that all of the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school were reflected on the questionnaire. This form of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) was pilot tested with three middle school teachers who are members of interdisciplinary teams and was inspected by a middle school expert. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), questions should be revised and retested until they are understood accurately by all or most members of the pretest sample and that respondents share the same understanding of the questions which establishes construct validity. This was the case with the final form of the questionnaire used in the current study (see Appendix A). Although the questionnaire data were not completely triangulated, individual questionnaire responses were cross-checked line item by line item with the individual's interview responses.

When initially developing the final questionnaire, input was requested from middle school colleagues and based on their comments, some questions were modified for clarity. Two middle school experts also worked closely with the researcher in developing the questions. A first draft of the questionnaire was developed using the protocol recommended by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996):

- Provide anonymity for the respondent
- Do not use technical terms
- Organize the items so they are easy to read and complete
- Number the questionnaire pages and items
- Include brief, clear instructions, printed in bold type and in upper and lower case
- When moving to a new topic, include a transitional sentence to help respondents switch their train of thought
- Provide a rationale for the items so the respondent understands the relevance to the study

This first draft of the questionnaire was field tested in a pilot study of three middle school interdisciplinary teams (Cronin, 2000) where data were collected and

analyzed. Although the data collected were robust, minor modifications were made to the questionnaire based on participant comments and suggestions (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) recommend a protocol for administering the questionnaire that includes pre-contacting the respondents and following up with non-respondents.

Participants in the current study were informed about the questionnaire before it was distributed at the beginning of November, 2005. Participant names did not appear on the questionnaire, but the researcher did create a master code list that contained a code for each participant. The codes were placed on the questionnaires, and each participant's name was checked off on the master code list as the questionnaires were returned to the researcher in a self-addressed stamped envelope per Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). Two weeks were allowed for participants to return the questionnaires. Two participants did not return the questionnaire and were sent new questionnaires which both participants returned to the researcher within three days.

Observations

The purpose of observation is to supplement interview and questionnaire data to build an in-depth picture of the case. The observation protocol for team meetings was based on recommendations made in Creswell, 1998:

- Select the site: The researcher chose the site because the school had begun to implement the NMSA recommendations for a successful middle school.
- Identify who, when, where, and for how long for observation: The researcher identified three interdisciplinary teams to study for approximately five months.
- Determine role as an observer: The researcher's role was one of non-participant observer.
- Identify a method for recording notes in the field: Team meetings were audio taped.

- Record aspects such as physical setting, informant behaviors, and researcher reactions: The researcher recorded detailed field notes in notebooks.
- Have someone introduce you and start with limited objectives in the first few observations: The researcher was introduced to team members by the principal and the team leaders.

Although there was no observation tool, the researcher, as a non-participant observer, captured the content of the meetings, interactions among team members, body language displayed, and discourse intonation by keeping field notes and audio taping team meetings. The researcher also collected team artifacts such as team meeting notes, team calendars, and team announcements. As recommended by Creswell (1998), the researcher kept records that were both descriptive and reflective, i.e., notes about the experiences, hunches, and learnings. Notes were taken for each team meeting to record team member interactions, physical seating arrangements, physical setting, and the researcher reactions. Although notes were taken, attention was primarily confined to observation of the participants themselves. According to Creswell (1998), “The early observational sessions may be times in which to take a few notes and confine attention to observing” (pp. 125-126).

The team observation phase of the study began in October 2005 following an accreditation committee site visitation and required state testing. The researcher was aware that the presence of an observer can affect the behaviors of the observed individuals. Initial team meetings were observed but not audio taped. The goal of team meeting observations with no audio taping was to create a comfortable, non-threatening atmosphere for the participants who were not accustomed to having an outsider observe their team meetings (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Thus team meetings, each approximately

45 minutes in length, were observed from October through mid-November 2005 with no audio taping.

By mid-November 2005, participants did not appear to be affected by the researcher's presence at team meetings. Team meeting discourse data were collected using audio tape between mid-November 2005 and mid-January 2006. Four team meetings for each of the three teams were audio taped. Audio taping the team meetings provided the researcher with valid and reliable data.

Methods of Data Analysis

All of the data from the audio tapes from team meetings and participant interviews were transcribed by the researcher and entered into computer Word documents. Participant names were not used in any of the transcripts, but transcripts were labeled to identify each individual so that the researcher could make connections among each participant's interview responses, questionnaire responses and discourse contributed during team meetings.

The Word documents from the interviews and the team meetings were uploaded into NVivo7 (2006) computer software developed by Qualitative & Solutions Research (QSR) International. This computer software allows one to code qualitative research data as well as to create memos and annotations connecting data sets.

According to Maxwell (1996), in qualitative research "The goal of coding is not to produce a count of things, but to 'fracture' the data and rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (pp. 78-79).

As the first step in coding the data, the researcher examined the transcribed interview of one individual teacher and the side notes made on that transcribed interview by the researcher. The researcher looked to see if that teacher expressed beliefs about those categories that NMSA (2005) recommends for a successful middle school. If an interview phrase was about curriculum, the phrase was placed into the category Curriculum. At this point, the researcher was only categorizing and did not determine if the belief was commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. That determination was made later.

Peer review provides an external check of the research process (Creswell, 1998). During the analysis of the data, a middle school expert who has expertise in education policy but was not involved in the study, acted as a peer debriefer and second coder to keep the researcher honest, to play “devil’s advocate,” and to ask questions about meanings and interpretations.

After the researcher had created categories from the individual interview transcript, this middle school expert examined the same transcript using the same method of creating categories as the researcher. Interview phrases placed within a category by the researcher were compared to those of the middle school expert. If there were discrepancies, the middle school expert questioned the researcher’s interpretation of the interview phrase. For example, the researcher placed the phrase “We (team members) all support each other well” in the Supportive Environment category. The second coder questioned this categorization believing that the phrase belonged in the Teaming category. The researcher explained that the Supportive Environment category referred to a positive school climate for the entire school community. For the team member who

made the statement, team member support made the school climate positive for her. After some discussion, the middle school expert and the researcher agreed that the phrase belonged in the Supportive Environment category.

The researcher and the middle school expert worked simultaneously for several days categorizing the interview phrases. The researcher then continued categorizing transcribed data but at weekly intervals met with the middle school expert to verify accurate and consistent coding.

The team meeting transcripts were coded using the same categories as the interview data. In consultation with middle school experts and recognizing that there is an overlap in the NMSA practices and cultural characteristics with no clear distinction among them, these practices and characteristics were reorganized for data analysis. The definitions do, however, remain the same as the NMSA (2005) definitions (see Appendix C). The categories are:

- I. Collaborative Leadership
- II. Teaming
 - A. Communication
 - B. Common Planning Time and Team focus
 - C. Shared Vision
 - D. Team Norms
- III. Knowledgeable Educators
- IV. Curriculum, Instruction, Multiple Teaching and Learning Approaches
 - A. Flexible Scheduling
 - B. Assessment and Evaluation
- V. Adult Advocate
- VI. School-Initiated Family Partnerships
- VII. Supportive Environment, Health, Wellness and Safety
 - A. Multifaceted Guidance and Support Services

Examples of interview phrases that were used to create categories are illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3

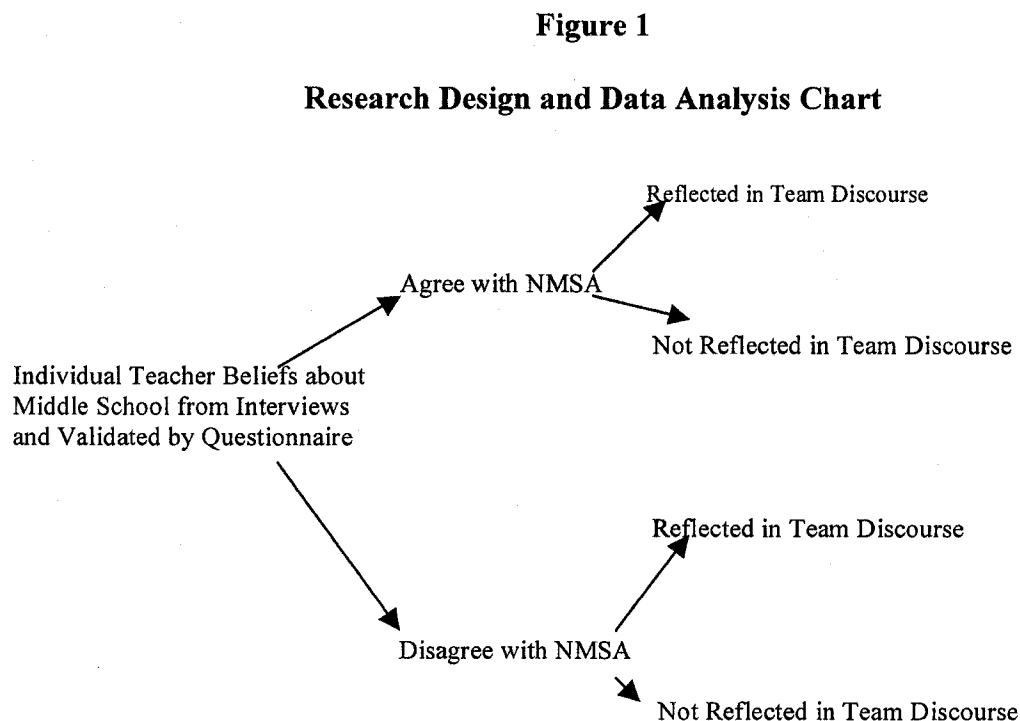
Interview Phrases Converted to NMSA Categories

Interview Phrase	NMSA Category
"He (principal) brings out the best in us"	Collaborative Leadership
"Administration caused a lot of friction between teams"	Collaborative Leadership
"It's a great idea to work in teams. It takes care of kids"	Teaming
"It's nice to be able to meet and discuss common concerns"	Teaming
"Team meetings can truly be feisty"	Teaming/Communication
"We could have four or five conversations going on at once"	Teaming/Communication
"...a lot of times this period becomes our second free period"	Common Planning Time
"A good meeting is when we have an absolute task"	Common Planning Time
"We don't have any goals in writing"	Teaming/Shared Vision
"...doing interdisciplinary units..."	Teaming/Shared Vision
"We kinda sit around and throw out ideas"	Team Norms
"I used to make an agenda but we don't stick to it"	Team Norms
"I like the idea of working with the middle school child"	Knowledgeable Educators
"We asked for training – didn't get it"	Knowledgeable Educators
"We do several main units like Egypt, Greece, Rome, Medieval"	Curriculum
"My job is to get them (students) ready for high school"	Curriculum
"We really love block (scheduling) and heterogeneous grouping"	Flexible Scheduling
"We don't have a lot of flexibility in our schedule"	Flexible Scheduling
"They (students) have to do a portfolio..."	Assessment & Evaluation
"...but they (students) bombed the last test"	Assessment & Evaluation
"...sacrifice a functioning academic period for advisory"	Adult Advocate
"Advisory is a waste of time"	Adult Advocate
"We have a spaghetti supper..."	Family and Community
"When is it (parent conferences) going to end? They're taking over..."	Family and Community
"We (team members) support each other well"	Supportive Environment
"Since the support is coming, she has a more positive attitude"	Supportive Environment

Teacher belief data about middle school were collected through individual interviews and validated by questionnaire responses from each participant as explained later in the chapter. Teacher belief data were then examined in relation to each of the NMSA (2005) characteristics of a successful middle school. Team meeting discourse

data were then examined to determine if individual teacher beliefs were reflected in team meetings.

Figure 1 below illustrates the process used to examine the data in relation to the NMSA recommendations for a successful middle school and to determine if individual beliefs were in agreement with the NMSA (2005) recommendations and reflected in team discourse.



Individual teacher beliefs about middle school from the interviews were examined and validated by responses from the personal/professional questionnaire. Individual teacher beliefs were compared to the NMSA (2005) recommendations to determine if those beliefs agreed or disagreed with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. Team meeting discourse data were then examined to determine if those individual teacher beliefs were reflected in the substance of team meetings.

A coding comparison report was generated to examine relationships between interview data and team meeting discourse data. The coding comparison report was not used as a central analytic technique but only as a tool to determine the number of coded phrases within each category. This examination of data uncovered the most frequent categories addressed in the interview and team meeting discourse data. The number of coded phrases is reported out in table form (see Appendix D).

Data from the questionnaire were used to corroborate interview data by direct line by line inspection of the questionnaire responses of each participant mapped onto interview responses by each individual. Questionnaire data were also used to identify discrepancies, if any, between the interview data and the NMSA (2005) school practices and cultural characteristics of a successful middle school. Individual team member questionnaire data from parts two and five are reported out in table form by team (see Appendix E). Since one teacher is a member of each team, his questionnaire data are reported in each team chart. However, recall that this is the teacher who assigned labels to each of the teams and held firm beliefs about the functioning of each team. Therefore, his data were used only to corroborate team members' statements or to add to the story of each team.

Limitations of the Study

This study is a bounded case study, bounded in time and context, in one middle school where the team is the unit of analysis. The study generated data on the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings and data on individual team member beliefs regarding middle school.

One limitation of the study is that the school represents only one evolving middle school in the process of implementing the NMSA (2005) recommendations to create a successful middle school. Studies in other evolving middle schools should be conducted.

Another limitation of the study is the self-report nature of the information that participants provided on the personal/professional questionnaire. The findings of this study are valid to the extent that the self-report information is accurate.

The structure and discourse of team meetings was largely determined by each individual team while the physical space and the school schedule limited to some degree how teams functioned. The time frame for collecting data was relatively short, five months, and only a sample of meetings was observed during that time. The results of the study cannot be generalized to other school settings. However, for middle schools that are similar in dynamics and constraints, the results may apply more generally.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings reflects team members' beliefs regarding the middle school concept and the school practices and cultural characteristics, as delineated by the NMSA (2005), that create successful schools for young adolescents. The research tools of interview, questionnaire, audio taped team meetings, and non-participant observation collected information on discourse at team meetings as well as information on individual team member beliefs regarding middle school. This chapter presented an overview of the site and population of the study, research design, instrumentation development, data collection procedures, reliability and verification of the instruments, methods of data analysis, and limitations of the study.

Per Lincoln and Guba (1985), the data summary in Chapter IV provides thick description allowing the reader to gain insight into and an understanding of individual team member beliefs as well as how those beliefs translate to team meetings.

CHAPTER IV

DATA SUMMARY

This study was designed to investigate how the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings reflects team member beliefs regarding middle school and the school practices and cultural characteristics recommended by the NMSA (2005).

The research tools of interview, questionnaire, and non-participant observation collected individual team member's beliefs regarding middle school that were analyzed in relation to the NMSA (2005) policy recommendations for a successful middle school.

The research was designed to answer the following question:

How does the substance of middle school interdisciplinary team meetings reflect team member beliefs regarding the middle school and the school practices and cultural characteristics of a successful middle school as identified by the NMSA (2005)?

In the following data analysis, each category is addressed in terms of National Middle School Association guideline definitions. Individual team member belief data, as captured through the interview and the questionnaire, and team meeting discourse data are compared to each other. Categories were examined in no particular sequence since NMSA views all categories as having equal weight. Categories are presented in a sequence to be most helpful to the reader. This chapter is a data report only in which all participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity. These pseudonyms do not necessarily reflect the gender of the participants.

Knowledgeable Educators

Knowledgeable educators are educators who value working with young adolescents and are prepared to do so which means they have a positive attitude about working with young adolescents, have had middle school preservice education and continuing inservice education (NMSA, 2005).

Interview data revealed individual teacher attitudes toward working with middle school children as well as, in some cases, teacher preparedness for teaching middle school. Questionnaire data provided detailed information about each teacher's education. Team meeting discourse data were examined for references to professional development. For each team, individual team member attitudes toward teaching middle school children, preservice education, and inservice education are examined.

Sixth Grade Team

Interview data revealed that none of the sixth grade teachers had planned to enter the teaching profession. When Melinda graduated from college, her mother told her "You should try to teach." So she became a substitute teacher who was willing to work with any grade level except middle school. She became interested in and started teaching middle school when her child was in sixth grade. Her concern is "for the kids and that they like learning." This illustrates her positive attitude about middle school children. Melinda did not discuss inservice education during the interview.

Yolanda entered teaching from the catering business. One of her former teachers, who had become a school administrator, hired her and said, "You've got to do middle school." Yolanda thought she wanted to teach first or second grade but decided to accept

a middle level position and found that she “absolutely loved it. I’ve never looked back. I just love this age. I love being a middle school teacher.”

At Olde Town Middle School, administration has set an expectation that teams engage in professional reading. Yolanda’s response to that requirement was “The principal wants us, every other Tuesday, to meet and read and share which is a lovely idea, but again, not understanding how hard it is just to meet as a team (for day to day concerns), instead of having the good effect that he wanted it to, we make fun of it. If we can have his undivided attention for just 20 minutes, we don’t want to read a passage and respond to it.” She did say that she went to a NELMS conference several years ago.

Pamela graduated from college and never wanted to teach. She was a substitute teacher when her children reached middle school age and thought “maybe I would like to do this.” She returned to college and earned a Master’s Degree in Education. She began teaching in a part time position at Olde Town Middle School where she has remained for eighteen years. She did say, “I enjoy teaching this age. I think its fun.”

Pamela explained “I was the first person in this school to ever go to a NELMS conference. I fell in love with it (middle school concept) and I came back and asked the principal why we weren’t doing these things. I talked about it so much that the next year he went and agreed that it was a really good concept and that we needed to start talking about it.” With NELMS supporting the teams for the next three years, Pamela said, “Through NELMS, we’re supposed to devote every other Tuesday to curriculum discussion. We agreed to that.” However Pamela expressed some doubt, “How far we will get, I don’t know.” Pamela also mentioned that she was enrolled in a class to study portfolio use for curriculum and assessment.

Ben graduated from college and worked in industry. He never thought he would be a teacher but found that industry was not for him. He started thinking and said “maybe I ought to try teaching.” In the early seventies, those with degrees in mathematics were very marketable. With his degree in mathematics, Ben was able to secure a position teaching sixth, seventh, and eighth grade mathematics. His thoughts on that position were “in those days, they just shoved you in a room, no resources or anything.” He remained in that position for one year and then came to Olde Town Middle School to teach mathematics and science. That was 32 years ago. His view of teaching, even after all those years, “I think even if I won the lottery, I would still love to teach. I enjoy what I do.” Ben mentioned that he was trained in Education by Design and Outcome Based Education, “You name the training and I’ve had it and you pick and choose things that mold around you.”

Questionnaire data regarding team member education and teaming experience showed that team members hold K-8 or secondary certification and three members of the four had no teaming experience prior to coming to Olde Town Middle School. Education is a second career for all of these teachers.

For this team, years of teaching experience range from 11 to 33. This team has been together for 11 years. Three of the four team members have been together for 16 years.

Questionnaire data also revealed that all team members believe that ample support is available for professional development. Only two team members believe that professional reading is important to the teaming process. One team member believes

there is ample professional development to support teaming while two team members are unsure and one team member strongly disagreed.

At team meetings, team member positive attitudes toward students were evident in comments such as “I’m really enjoying the kids,” “They’re (students) all nice” and “There isn’t a bad kid in there.” At one team meeting, there was a reference to a professional development workshop related to improving student writing. There was also mention of course work offered by the principal through a local university that team members had completed. At this same meeting the principal presented a brief overview and explained his expectations of the team concerning a program presented at a recent workshop. The principal also explained changes in the teacher evaluation process and that he might “include some recommended reading that might be connected to what your interests are.” Team members listened politely with no substantive response to this comment. Generally team response to the principal’s professional development recommendations reflected individual beliefs that for some professional reading was not important.

Seventh Grade Team

During the interview, Laura mentioned that she left teaching for a period of time to run her own business. However, after several years of feeling that she was missing something that she could not explain, she returned to teaching. Laura further explained that she always “loved this grade level” and was thrilled when she was hired for a seventh grade teaching position at Olde Town Middle School.

Laura also mentioned that the seventh grade team is enrolled in a curriculum and assessment course being offered by the principal through a local university. Laura is the

oldest member of the team and viewed the team situation as a “great experience. They (team members) really taught me a lot about the newer ways of doing things. My age and experience kind of offsets their youth and excitement. It’s a great experience.”

For Barbara, who completed a one year teaching internship at the high school level, teaching middle school was a suggestion from those with whom she had worked. When a high school teaching position was not available, she accepted a seventh grade teaching position and has been teaching seventh grade ever since then. She also mentioned that being given the opportunity to work with NELMS on an integrated unit would enable the team “to finally do something we’ve been trying to do for a few years.”

Fran graduated from college and began teaching at the elementary grade level. When a seventh/eighth grade position became vacant, her colleagues encouraged her to apply for the position. After much thought, she accepted the position and in her words, “Once I got in there, I loved it.” Fran loves teaching middle school children but “some days I wonder if it’s worth it. The kids are an animal of themselves and you really have to understand the animal in order to teach it.” Fran also mentioned that she was looking forward to working with NELMS over the next few years.

Mark, a first year teacher with secondary certification, applied and interviewed for a high school position at Olde Town Middle/High School. He was not hired for the high school position but decided to interview for a seventh grade position at Olde Town even though he did not want to teach seventh graders. He was offered the seventh grade position and accepted it. For Mark, “I will not be a seventh grade teacher for anything that approaches even half of my career.” He did indicate that within the next three years,

there will be two high school positions open at Olde Town for which he will apply. Mark is focused more on his own day to day planning than on inservice education.

Questionnaire data regarding team member education and experience showed that the seventh grade team did not have middle school preparation. Their certifications are K-8 and secondary. Years of teaching experience range from a first year teacher to a teacher with 17 years of teaching experience. With the exception of Mark, all members have had prior teaming experience. Fran and Laura have five years of prior teaming experience while Barbara has had three years. This team has been together for less than five years.

Questionnaire data further revealed that all team members except Barbara believe there is ample support for professional development. Only Mark indicated that professional reading is important to the teaming process. Only Laura indicated that there is ample professional development to support teaming.

At team meetings there were a few references that the team would be working with NELMS but discussion was mainly conjecture about what NELMS would be doing with the team in the future. This was their only reference to professional development. With the exception of Mark, team members seemed happy that NELMS would be working with the team.

Eighth Grade Team

Nancy mentioned during the interview that she had completed her student teaching at the junior high school level where she became interested in that age group. She took a position at Olde Town Middle School 32 years ago. With regard to being a middle school teacher, she said, "I was trained in secondary and it's been a slow

transition from that secondary over to the middle school. And I don't know that I'm all the way there yet. There are parts that I struggle with." She did say that "the kids are important" but did not share anything more than "I like the idea of working with the middle school child."

Maura graduated from college and worked in industry for a few years but was not happy at her job. A friend suggested that she enter teaching. She returned to college to pursue a career in teaching. She worked in seventh grade during her internship and found that she loved this age group. She added, "I am so happy I chose this profession and made a change from doing research because this is more me. I love to reach out to kids. I found the perfect niche in my life and plan to be here a long time." Maura indicated that there were many changes taking place in the school with the help and support of NELMS. She was looking forward to having NELMS help the team with an interdisciplinary unit where the culminating activity would be the eighth grade trip to Washington, DC.

Oscar had always liked children and always wanted to be a teacher. He began in sixth grade and eventually moved to seventh and eighth grade. He is attending graduate school and indicated that maybe he would like to move to the high school level. He also said, "I'd love to teach a junior college class someday and move on up eventually." Oscar mentioned having read an article (required reading for a faculty meeting) that suggested two person teams which he felt would be more effective than the current four person teams.

Wilma began the interview with "I didn't want to be a middle school teacher." She began teaching ninth and eleventh grade at Olde Town Middle/High School 22 years

ago and loved that. She was later moved to the middle school grades and had a very difficult time. According to Wilma, "I do like the middle schoolers now but I do miss the conversations and the intellect of the high school kids. I love 'em (middle schoolers) but they're apprentice human beings." Wilma did not discuss inservice education.

Questionnaire data regarding team member education and experience showed that none of the eighth grade team members had middle school preparation. Their certifications are K-8 and secondary with the exception of Maura who has a 5-8 General Science certification. Years of teaching experience range from 17 to 32 years. None of the team members have had prior teaming experience. This team has been together for sixteen years.

According to the questionnaire data, three team members believe that ample support is available for professional development while one team member is unsure. However, Oscar and Maura indicated that there was not ample professional development to support teaming. As a whole, the team indicated that professional reading was not important to the teaming process.

In team meeting discourse data, the only reference to professional development was that a day with NELMS was scheduled on the same day as the team job share day, a program where students shadow a work day with members of the local community. Team reaction to this conflict was direct and decisive; NELMS could work more with the sixth and seventh grade teams that day.

Team meetings revealed a team overwhelmed and frustrated with student behavioral issues and lack of student motivation. Thus, individual attitudes about

teaching middle school students were not reflective of attitudes expressed in the interviews.

Supportive Environment, Health, Wellness, and Safety

“Successful schools for young adolescents are universally characterized by a culture that is inviting, supportive, and safe. Students and staff feel that they belong” (NMSA, 2005, p. 35). “Teachers who work in a positive environment create a positive environment for their students” (NMSA, 2005, p. 39).

Sixth Grade Team

During the interview, Melinda mentioned “trying to get them (students) through this rough age.” With regard to her teaming experience, she only replied, “Fine. Fine.”

Yolanda said that students “need good role models and people who will help them make good decisions. It’s a difficult time and they’re trying to find themselves. We need to be there for that.” Although Yolanda expressed respect for her team members, she did say that there have been difficult times for the team. Individual circumstances and events determine the mood of the team on any given day. There are times when people are tired and feeling stress which may affect how the team operates that day. Yolanda’s perception that the school climate is not positive is based primarily on issues related to the prior administration and conflict among members on the team.

Pamela mentioned the range of student maturity levels, “It’s recognizing that those differences exist and at the same time, everyone’s changing and you need to change (to meet student needs).” Pamela was quite explicit that there was tension among the teams which has created a negative school climate. People had been hurt by the labels assigned to each of the teams by another faculty member. According to Pamela, those

labels, “the good,” “the bad,” and “the ugly” have created hard feelings among teams. It was especially troublesome for the teams since the person who assigned the labels would not reveal which label was assigned to which team.

Questionnaire data revealed that Pamela and Yolanda do not believe the school climate is positive for teachers. Ben believes that the team makes new members feel welcome while the rest of the team disagreed with Ben. Yolanda feels isolated from other people in the building while Pamela is unsure about feeling isolated from other people in the building.

Much of team time was spent discussing specific student concerns that primarily related to family issues. One child was in an anger management group provided by the guidance department. Pamela commented, “Since the support is coming, she has a more positive attitude.” At the same meeting, guidance personnel mentioned having sent Big Brother/Big Sister applications home with several students who are also in the anger management group. With regard to another student, comments such as “He seems happier during lunch since he started with the group” and “He’s just coming out of his shell” were made.

Seventh Grade Team

Laura explained that it is important to create a nurturing and “family” environment that will support students both academically and socially. Interview data also revealed Laura’s support for the team, “I’m always worried if they’re (team members) not happy or if something happens and what can we do as a team to make it better for that other person and help him or her out.”

Barbara mentioned that the school should be a “community of learners where everyone’s working together on the educational experience” but did not elaborate on how this related to the school environment. Rather she focused on the limitations of the school structure and the negative impact this had on her perception of what the seventh grade team could be doing. Barbara described the school environment, “It’s not a friendly middle school environment. I’m at the end of my stick-with-it-ness in this type of environment because it takes too much out of the people that know what middle school should be doing” yet she added, “We (team members) all support each other very well.”

Fran described her teaming experience, “I probably would have gone back to the elementary school if it hadn’t been for that support system (team). Just having that teaming supports you.” For Fran, team support is what makes the school climate positive for her.

For Mark, he viewed middle school as “fostering a good sense of community” but like Barbara, he did not elaborate. He alluded to team members in terms of being “friendly with them but not friends” but there was no mention of team support.

According to questionnaire data, Barbara does not believe that the school climate is positive for teachers. Two of the other team members disagreed with Barbara and one team member was unsure. All team members agreed that they make new members feel welcome. Fran is the only team member who does not feel isolated from other people in the building.

Team meetings provided some information regarding support for students. One student who could not afford the cost of attending the week at Nature’s Classroom was reassured by the team that he could attend regardless of the monetary situation. At

another team meeting, a considerable amount of time was spent scheduling classes for a returning student to provide the most supportive environment for that child.

Eighth Grade Team

During the interview Nancy mentioned wanting to help kids but did not mention a supportive team environment. Maura mentioned that for her it was a good feeling “deciding on how to help a child and setting a plan” for that child. Maura also mentioned that the team works closely with the guidance counselor. Like Nancy, Maura did not mention a supportive team environment. Oscar did not mention a supportive environment for children but did describe the team environment as “a trust that you have with each other, kind of pitching in and helping if somebody needs it.” He described a good meeting as “a meeting when we all agree on something. We will all support each other on an issue.” However, he described the actual team environment quite differently, “we rarely see things unanimously any more,” that the team was “not an equal partnership,” and for some, trust and confidence had been lost.

Like Oscar, Wilma did not mention a supportive team environment for students. However, Wilma and Oscar “work well together as colleagues” but Wilma does not have that collegiality with others on the team. She said, “Collegiality is built on trust and respect” which she has with Oscar. “He helps me out where he can.”

Questionnaire data revealed that Oscar is the only team member who does not believe that the school climate is positive for teachers and who does not believe that the team makes new members feel welcome. Maura and Wilma do not feel isolated from other people in the building while Nancy and Oscar do.

Team meetings conveyed the feeling of a team environment that was not supportive for students. Team members consistently discussed student behavioral issues yet there was no indication of any team plans that would help the students adjust their behaviors. Instead, the team shifted the responsibility on the administration to solve the problems, a response typical of junior high school teachers. It was evident at team meetings that team members did not support and encourage each other. Team members took a “talk at” posture rather than a “talk with” posture.

Collaborative Leadership

“High performing middle schools have high-performing, learning-centered leaders – principals and teachers – working collaboratively to enhance student learning” (NMSA, 2005, p.19).

While the study was being conducted, the school was under the direction of an interim principal and at the same time, the school was in the beginning stages of implementing the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school. Team leaders were appointed by previous administration with no apparent rationale for selecting them. Originally team leaders were a conduit for communication among administration, other faculty members, and the team. However, the responsibilities of team leaders have changed and there is no team leader job description to help team leaders understand their new responsibilities. Rottier (1996) would include facilitation of team meetings, integration of course content and skills, and assistance in helping the team assess progress toward goals as some of the duties of a team leader.

Interview data showed that leadership was viewed as embodied by the principal or the team leader. Two items on the questionnaire rank ordered the degree of administrative support and opportunity for teachers to assume leadership.

Sixth Grade Team

During the interview, Bob, a teacher assigned to all three teams, expressed his thoughts about the principal, "He's putting a lot more responsibility on the teams. I think it's the way to go because some of the things we were doing didn't work." Bob indicated that the principal attends one team meeting every other week to address curriculum. Bob would "love to be a leader" who could say "this is how we can integrate our classrooms around a common theme" but "I don't feel trained well enough to do that. I think we need leadership in that area."

Because Bob is a member of all three teams, he said "They're (administration) too busy to know what's going on and I kinda keep tabs on everything that's going on." Questionnaire data revealed that Bob believes that opportunities are available for teachers to assume leadership and that administrative support for faculty is ample. Bob is an interim team leader for the sixth grade team. Although Bob was interim team leader, he did not take on leadership responsibilities. Observation revealed that he did not facilitate team meetings or take any notes at the meeting. With no notes, it seemed as though Bob was dependent on his memory when he represented the team at team leader meetings. He did report what was discussed at team leader meetings. However, while Bob would be coloring or planning his lessons, other team members would conduct the meeting. He often made witty remarks that had no connection to the team discussion.

During the interview, Melinda's only reference to leadership was "The major challenges of teaming are whatever the administration gives us." This illustrates her belief in and dependency on the hierarchical model of leadership as well as demonstrating that she believes that she is subordinate to the administration. She does not view leadership as a collaborative endeavor.

Yolanda explained administration differently. "I haven't found an administrator yet who understands how busy sixth grade is. The principal wants us to read and share every other Tuesday but we make fun of it – we kinda joke about it." On the other hand she seemed appreciative yet, at the same time, disappointed about the way team planning time is used. "The principal got us one more planning period per day for curriculum/team time, but it just doesn't happen. Meeting time is mostly with parents." What she implied was a lack of team leadership. She did add that "A new team leader every quarter is an interesting concept." This concept had been mentioned by administration as a possible alternative to the current team leader assignments.

Pamela expressed excitement with the direction the school is taking and attributed it to the principal's leadership. "I'm glad that we have a person in charge right now that has a middle school philosophy and a middle school concept and the school is directed towards it. The direction is a positive one because we've kind of been doing everything by the seat of our pants without a lot of people really understanding what it (middle school) is." Pamela also mentioned that "Ted (principal) comes to team meetings every other Tuesday for curriculum discussions. I'm going to suggest that Ted come every Tuesday. They're a different team with him present. There's no one in control at meetings." Like Yolanda, Pamela indicated that there was a lack of team leadership.

Ben mentioned that “Ted is the first administrator that has ever brought the issue (team goals) up” and “Ted has a wonderful concept about sharing goals.” He did mention that team planning time was used for too many parent conferences which interfered with time the team could spend on planning and refining interdisciplinary units. Similar to Yolanda and Pamela, Ben was also implying a lack of team leadership.

Questionnaire data revealed that one sixth grade team member believes that administrative support is ample while three team members are unsure. Three team members believe that leadership opportunities are available for the faculty while Yolanda disagreed with this.

Leadership was not displayed at team meetings by the interim team leader. His major contribution to team meetings was reporting information from team leader meetings. He did not conduct team meetings, did not take notes for future reference, and was often performing other tasks during meetings. He viewed his role of team leader as nothing more than a conduit to administration. At one team meeting, Melinda agreed with what the principal said about curriculum and team goals by saying “Um hmm” thirty-eight times, a further indication of her belief that leadership is not collaborative. Pamela mentioned curriculum mapping workshops that were required by the administration. At one team meeting the principal presented a brief overview and explained his expectations from the team regarding a program presented at a recent workshop. The principal also explained revisions in and implementation of the teacher evaluation process. The actions of the administration at this meeting indicate, perhaps, that the principal does not view leadership as a collaborative effort.

Seventh Grade Team

Mark, the first year teacher, is the only team member who expressed thoughts during the interview about leadership. "Having that administrative presence is key. I think Ted (principal) and James (assistant principal) do a great job. When Ted's here, he does bring out the best in us." He believed that the team was doing a lot of the administration's pet projects in an effort to compare Olde Town Middle School to other schools (in the area) but for Mark, Olde Town Middle School is not like other middle schools in the area and should not be compared to them.

Laura, the team leader, mentioned that she "worries if the team is not happy" and asks "What can we do to make it better for that person (individual team member)?"

Barbara implied her dissatisfaction with decisions made by the previous administration regarding special education case manager assignments that required a case manager to be shared with two grade levels. She was cautious about making statements about the principal or what a new principal would bring to the school. Her only comment about the principal was that he did help the team with difficult parents.

Leadership was not a topic that Fran discussed.

Questionnaire data for two team members revealed that leadership opportunities are available for the faculty and for all team members, except Barbara who disagreed, administrative support is ample.

At team meetings Laura facilitated team meetings to some degree but for the most part, allowed people to do whatever they wanted during team time. For example, team members would leave a meeting and return later, grade student papers, work on the computer, or carry on separate conversations. Perhaps this is why Barbara once

mentioned that the team leader is “too nice.” Barbara also said that “administration does help with difficult parents.” Laura, the team leader, did use notes from her calendar to bring up items for team discussion but did not take notes. She depended on Barbara to take notes on a form labeled Agenda.

Eighth Grade Team

For the eighth grade team, interview data revealed a difference of opinion about the team leader position. Nancy, the team leader, only mentioned that she reports information from team leader meetings to the team.

Maura said, “She (team leader) goes back to the next team leader meeting and expresses what we (team) talked about. So that’s our way of communicating (with the administration).” Maura also mentioned that she has been asked (by two team members) to be team leader and “I’ve turned them down because she (current team leader) has been team leader for a long time and she would feel like it was a demotion.” However, Maura added “I would like to be team leader just because I like to be involved in the team leader meetings.”

Oscar viewed the team leader very differently. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the team leader position. “The team is not an equal partnership. You are saying that one person is the team leader and therefore more important. Team leader is really another name for department head.” He insinuated that he did not feel supported by the administration because of the team leader position. He viewed the team leader as a barrier between himself and the administration similar to the department head position at a junior high school level.

Wilma expressed a similar thought as Oscar, "I don't think we're a four person team. We can be talking about one student and it quickly gets turned around to teacher issues with whatever problem she's (team leader) having at the moment." Wilma also added that "What we say as a group isn't always translated at team leader meetings." indicating a barrier between administration and the team. Wilma only referred to the principal in reference to team goals, "This is the first year that I can recall that an administrator has asked for our goals individually and as a team and as they apply to the district."

Questionnaire data revealed that only the team leader believes that there are leadership opportunities for the faculty. The other members strongly disagreed with that statement. Nancy and Maura, from questionnaire data, agreed that administrative support is ample while Wilma and Oscar disagreed with the statement.

Discourse at team meetings supported Oscar's belief that collaborative leadership is not in place. During discussion about student behavior issues, the team leader mentioned that the subject had been discussed at a team leader meeting. Oscar responded by saying, "It's (team leader meeting) putting a level between us and administration. We don't have this discussion with Ted (principal) or James (assistant principal). You as team leaders are having it. There is no connection (of administration) to the teams. The team should be having the discussion with administration."

Oscar made a suggestion about how to resolve student behavior issues that was supported by Wilma and Maura. The team leader (voiced raised) said, "You know what they're (administration) going to say? They're going to say wonderful ideas; the team does it!" The team leader added that administration said to reinforce the school

principles with the students. Sarcastically, Wilma responded, “I love Ted’s optimism. Just show ‘em (students) the chart and they will turn around. He hasn’t been in the classroom to see.” Wilma’s response illustrated her view that administrative support was absent.

Nancy, the team leader, referenced administration in many cases where decisions had been made as illustrated by her comment, “Bob, correct me if I’m wrong but isn’t that what TED (principal) said at the last team leader meeting?” She abdicated her team leader responsibility. Nancy viewed her role as team leader as a conduit from the administration to the team rather than take on any leadership role herself. She did not demonstrate leadership.

Eighth grade team meeting time was spent primarily discussing student behavioral issues and for three members, especially Oscar, the lack of administrative support in dealing with inappropriate student behaviors.

Teaming

“Organizational structures that facilitate learning and nurture relationships have to be flexible, small learning communities (teams) so the needs of the students can be recognized and adjustments made in form and function to maximize learning” (NMSA, 2005, p. 141).

In this section, team communication, common planning time and team focus, and shared vision and team norms are discussed under separate headings within this general category. Interview data provided individual teacher perceptions of what teams are supposed to do and how they behave.

Nine questionnaire items rank ordered teacher attitude toward teaming and the purpose of teaming.

For Bob, teaming is teaching that references a common theme. He did point out however that at Olde Town Middle School “We have some issues with people who are not very welcome to change. We tend not to change well and when experts come in and say you’re not doing something right, we tend to fight it. I think having NELMS is going to be a real eye opener to some because we have a long way to go (in becoming a middle school).”

Being a member of all teams, Bob described the teams as “three groups of people who couldn’t be any more different in the dynamic of the whole thing. The (team) issues are drastically different and some get along better than others.” Bob also introduced the teams to the researcher as “the good,” “the bad,” and “the ugly.” A sixth grade team member indicated that Bob had introduced the teams in this same manner in other settings. What he did not seem to know or perhaps understand is how much this hurt team members at all three grade levels.

Bob also mentioned that much of team time is spent meeting with parents and added “I think if we could get into doing some of the things that teams are supposed to do, specifically the interdisciplinary stuff and the curriculum work, it’d be fun.”

Sixth Grade Team

Interview data revealed that Melinda doesn’t “worry too much about the middle school concept. I don’t worry about all the bells and whistles and there are people who like to do that and that’s fine but that’s not who I am.” However, Melinda did add “It’s nice to be able to meet and discuss common concerns.”

For Yolanda teaming means “having a common essential question and having different slants to it” but added “I’ve had personality glitches with one of the members and that’s been hard yet do you move to another team or resolve it?” With this statement, Yolanda revealed her belief that personalities play a role in team effectiveness. Yolanda loves being part of a team because “you have the same kids” and it removes the “feeling of isolation.”

Pamela’s perception of teaming “is when two or more subject area teachers get together to plan something so that while the children are learning or participating in it, they’re getting it from two different approaches and making connections.” She added that her team believes that all subject areas need to be involved in a unit at the same time but she said she wanted to remove that focus; “It might be a good thing to do two person teams.” Pamela also expressed concern about how the team functioned as a group. Administration has suggested changing team composition but Pamela said she didn’t want to see that happen, “I would rather see us be able to work things out.” Like Yolanda, Pamela suggested that individual team member attitudes and personalities affect team effectiveness.

Ben’s view of teaming focused on the children. “It’s a great idea to work in teams. It takes care of the kids. We work collegially hopefully, if we can. We trust within the team if there is friction that we work professionally for the benefit of the kids.” He also said teaming was “integrating different subjects within our class and within our group and that we make decisions collectively. That’s the purpose so that it is a collective decision-making team” but “we need time to organize. There needs to be a stop to all these parent meetings.” The team appeared to be in agreement with what team

members think a team should do yet three of the four team members viewed individual team member attitudes and behaviors as important components to team effectiveness.

Questionnaire data indicated that three teachers believe they are encouraged to act collaboratively but only two team members believe that sufficient time is available for teachers to meet. Yolanda was the only team member who indicated that she felt isolated from others in the building while Pamela was unsure. Questionnaire data also revealed that only two team members are in agreement with objectives they are trying to achieve with students and all team members are unsure that the team has specific goals for student achievement. However, three team members do believe the purpose of teams is to have common students while one team member is unsure. All team members believe that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement, and to do interdisciplinary units. Individual team members also support heterogeneous grouping and block scheduling.

Discourse at team meetings did not relate to teaming per se. However, there was evidence that individual team member beliefs were reflected at team meetings. The team did meet and discuss common concerns. Taking advantage of the fact that they have students in common allowed them to focus on the children. They did make decisions collectively regarding the children. Although there was little evidence of any integrated curriculum discussion at team meeting, it was evident that some integrated curriculum was in place for this team. Student work in classrooms and the hallways such as student art work, student story boards, and student posters demonstrated that.

Sixth grade team meeting discourse was directed toward regrouping students for more heterogeneous class groupings, planning student activities for the day just prior to

winter break, confirming dates of upcoming parent conferences, and expressing and discussing student concerns both academic and social/behavioral/emotional. This reflects individual beliefs that the purpose of teaming is common concerns and collective decision making with a child centered focus. Beliefs about integrated curriculum and improved student achievement were not evident at team meetings.

Seventh Grade Team

From interview data, Laura's view of teaming is "I get to work with my team and talk about ideas. It's a great opportunity to sit and talk about kids, their problems, not only curriculum but the kids themselves and how we can help them." Laura further added, "I love the kids as much as they can drive you crazy. It (teaming) is very, very satisfying."

For Barbara teaming is a "community of learners with four main subject areas and a reading specialist." Her perception of the seventh grade team is, "We are a team. We are able to work together as a team. We all support each other very well." Barbara also mentioned how she felt about the possibility of changing team composition, "It would be better to have the teams reflect on what's going on than just move them." She believes that "personalities affect a team as much as your knowledge base or your experience." Barbara is the only team member who mentioned that "the special education person needs to be part of the team and at every meeting."

For Fran, teaming is connecting subject areas but stressed the importance of connecting with team members. "They're your support system. I don't think I would have gotten this far or love the middle school if I didn't have the teaming."

Mark viewed teaming “as the pursuit of some type of common goal and to make sure that no kid falls through the cracks.”

Questionnaire data indicated that teachers perceived that they are encouraged to act collaboratively. Barbara and Mark, however, indicated that they felt isolated from other people in the building. Only two team members believe that sufficient time is available to meet together, that members agree with objectives they are trying to achieve with students, that the team has specific goals for student achievement, and that common students is the prime purpose of teaming. Three team members agreed that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement while Barbara was unsure.

Team meeting discourse was not directly related to teaming. Discussions centered on student concerns, parent meetings, creation of a rotating schedule of classes, advice for grouping specific students, and one curriculum topic. Considerable time was spent planning for a team presentation to the school board as well as planning time to work on an integrated curriculum unit. These discussions, although superficial, did reflect to some degree individual beliefs that the purpose of teaming is common students, collective decision making, integrated curriculum, and improved student achievement.

Eighth Grade Team

According to the interview data, teaming is defined by Nancy as “different subject areas who are working together as a team” yet added “The new grading system has brought us lots of philosophical discussions, we’re bringing different view points yet we haven’t reached any kind of conclusion.”

For Maura teaming is more than planning integrated units. “It’s sharing what you’ve got going on. You don’t want to have three tests in one day for a student.”

Oscar defined teaming as “each member of a team using their subject area to address a common theme” and then added “The idea of teams I think also is to be supportive of each other, to help each other with questions, a colleague to come into your classroom and maybe observe and give you some help. I think it’s a trust that you have with each other, kind of pitching in and helping if somebody needs it.” Oscar also discussed the idea of equality on teams, “The team consists of four equal parts. Everybody has equal say in the decisions and problems and policies of that team.” He went on to say that a real plus of teaming is “being able to share with colleagues your concerns about kids. That part of teaming is great in that you really do get to know the kids.” Oscar also said that “two person teams or smaller teams would be more effective.”

For Wilma, teaming meant “teachers from core and exploratory courses work together developing a unit for the kids that would encompass their math, their science, their specials, their language arts and doing all that under one umbrella, one theme.” She did add that “I think we’ve helped some kids by sharing information.” Wilma also said, “I don’t think we’re a team. It’s not an equal partnership. I do think it’s a good idea to mix up the teams,” an idea that is different from the beliefs of a few teachers on other teams.

Questionnaire data revealed that all team members, with the exception of Oscar, believe that teachers are encouraged to act collaboratively. Oscar and Nancy indicated that they felt isolated from other people in the building. Two team members agreed that sufficient time is available for teachers to meet and two team members were unsure about sufficient time being available. Nancy, the team leader, is the only member who indicated that she wasn’t sure what the purpose of teams was. Nancy and Maura agreed

that there are specific goals for student achievement. However, two team members agreed that the purpose of teams was to have common students while two team members were unsure about the statement. Three team members agreed and one team member was unsure that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement. Two team members agreed with the statement that the purpose of teaming is to do interdisciplinary units; one team member was unsure and one team member disagreed.

Team meeting discourse data did not relate to teaming per se but did reveal some insight into individual beliefs that were not supported by the data. This seemed to be a team that gave various reasons why some things did not get done such as planning an integrated unit. For example, there was never enough time, there were too many parent meetings, and there were too many student related behavioral issues that needed to be discussed. All team members believe that developing integrated units is one of the main reasons for teaming. However there was little evidence related to discussing or planning integrated units. There was also little evidence of sharing what's going on in individual classrooms in terms of curriculum. The team did share information about students but that information was primarily related to inappropriate student behavior in classrooms or in the hallway. Oscar's belief that a team consists of four equal parts was mentioned at team meetings but in the context of the team leader and administration having more authority in the decisions and policies of the team. Support for individual beliefs was carried out in varying degrees because of the way team meetings were conducted by the team leader.

A. Communication

When examining how schools might implement teams in ways that ultimately improve student achievement, NMSA (2005) states that “effective teams have a culture of discourse at their center; communicating well within the team as well as with others outside the team” (p. 143). Good communication is vital for maintaining positive interactions within a school community. Communication in this section of the data summary is strictly related to communication within the team. Communication with others outside the team is addressed in other sections such as those that address contact with parents or leadership. It is interesting that NMSA gives more attention to the organizational structures within a middle school such as size of the interdisciplinary team and quantity of team planning time than it does to communication.

Examining the data provided some insight into communication patterns of the team members. Bob, the teacher assigned to all three teams, describes the three teams quite differently from each other relative to communication. He categorizes the sixth grade team as a team where discussions can become “too heated for me” or where “they argue pretty vehemently; very, very angry with one another.” Bob perceives the seventh grade team as being “much more relaxed, less formal.” According to Bob, the seventh grade team documents well. He describes the eighth grade team as “the one most teamless” with a team leader who “is a strong individual who quite literally runs the meetings with an agenda in her head and she generally tailors the conversation to what she feels needs to be done.”

Sixth Grade Team

Much of Bob's perception of the sixth grade team seems to be corroborated by sixth grade team member interview data. Yolanda stated that "I pick and choose my battles" and team meetings "can truly be feisty" and that she has "seen screaming, literally screaming (at each other)."

Pamela explained that "With my team sometimes I feel like I'm always batting heads and that I'm always the one that's wrong"; that one team member "lies to cover herself and I just can't operate with people like that"; and "cooperation is one of the major challenges of interdisciplinary teaming."

Ben confirmed Bob's perception regarding team meeting discourse. With regard to team meetings, Ben said "We've had some conflicting moments and I never realized it would be that way. It's because some people can be very strong in their beliefs and very strong willed." Ben also said, "We're trying to be collegial," that arguing was "a waste of time and energy," and "we tolerate each other now."

Melinda said "It's nice to be able to meet and discuss common concerns," that she is uncomfortable when "there are altercations between members (of the team) or if one person wants to do something a certain way." Melinda also said, "We vent sometimes which is healthy, a healthy way of getting your confusion out."

Data from the questionnaires supported individual beliefs expressed in the interviews. With the exception of the sixth grade team leader, all other team members agreed that consensus means that all team members must agree. Two of the team members disagreed with the statement: I feel I can express my thoughts at a team meeting while two team members agreed that they can express their thoughts at team meetings.

Except for the team leader, all team members agreed with: I feel I participate in decisions made by the team.

Although the sixth grade team members described team meetings where personality conflicts could cause heated discussions, team meeting discourse data revealed that the discussions were cordial. Observation revealed that team members expressed their thoughts and participated in decisions made by the team. There was only one incident of Yolanda interrupting and disagreeing with Pamela and Pamela's response was "Let me finish!" to which Yolanda replied "I'm sorry."

Upon examination of interview data, all individuals on the team perceived a team filled with conflict in face-to-face communication. Questionnaire data supported a high level of communication among team members but not a particular communication style. However, team meeting discourse indicated that these two perceptions are not necessarily in conflict because there was a high degree of communication yet only a few instances where their perception of conflict showed up. Team members seldom interrupted each other and Ben often added levity to the meetings. Presence of the researcher may have affected team behavior.

Seventh Grade Team

From individual interviews, seventh grade team members described team meetings as being "very informal," that "a lot of times it becomes our second free period with Jen doing four things at once and Laura and Barbara talking and me (Mark) sitting on the sidelines making witty retorts," that "we're organized chaos and we know it," and that "we're constantly talking to one another."

Mark, a first year teacher, did not feel comfortable questioning other team members and described his relationship with them as “being friendly with them but not friends. I’m polite.” He also added, “It’s mostly Fran trying to do four things at once and none of it having to do with the team and then it’s Laura and Barbara with their back and forth.” He insinuated that he was feeling left out of team discussions.

Other team members explained that “it’s (team meeting) a great time to sit and talk about kids,” and that “we always come to agreement somehow.” Fran summed up team meetings as “We could have four or five conversations at once and really accomplish a lot and then you walk out and realize that we finished or accomplished something and we’re good at communicating as a team. It’s real important to have open communication.” Fran perceived communication as a key element to successful teaming and believed that the team communicated well.

Laura always wanted a team that could communicate well and told a story of how a sixth grade teacher was jealous of what she perceived to be good seventh grade communication skills. Similarly, Barbara believed that the team communicated well, “We’re able to communicate openly with one another – no problem. If somebody says something you don’t like, you’re able to say, hey, wait a second!”

Questionnaire data revealed that only the team leader believed that consensus means that everyone agrees. Three team members believe that they can express their thoughts at a team meeting while Barbara did not believe that she could. This is a contradiction to her interview statements about communication. Noting her high participation level in team meetings, it would seem that her questionnaire response was not commensurate with her behavior or perhaps she did not express her true thoughts on

the questionnaire. Two team members strongly believe that they participate in the decisions made by the team while the others did not agree, one being Mark, the first year teacher.

Observation of seventh grade team meetings revealed that discussions were very friendly and light hearted yet serious when necessary. At times, there were three or four conversations taking place simultaneously and yet, the team did accomplish the task of completing plans for a team presentation to the school board.

Several team meetings fit the descriptions given during the interviews. One person might be hole-punching papers while others might be correcting quiz papers. Even while giving the appearance of 'not listening', these team members were part of all conversations. This team seemed to communicate well as indicated when one person would finish another person's sentence. This team was very welcoming to anyone who interrupted the meeting, be it a student, another faculty member, or a school administrator.

This team displayed good rapport with one another as well as open communication. Interview data revealed good team communication which was supported by questionnaire data. Observed team meetings, although chaotic at times, revealed a team that communicates well.

Eighth Grade Team

Bob's perception of the eighth grade team as "the one most teamless" and dominated by the team leader is not seen by all team members in the same way. Oscar's interview revealed agreement with Bob about the team leader having more power or being "more important, we don't have any say anymore, we feel that one vote (team

leader) is skewed.” Oscar believes that, “The biggest challenge of interdisciplinary teaming is communication.”

Wilma views the team situation in a similar manner: “I don’t think we are a four person team. I think that some of us get overruled and some of us get interrupted all the time. Some of us don’t get heard. It’s the loudest voice not necessarily the most reasonable. Certain people have agendas that need to be fulfilled above and beyond the needs of the students, the team, and the program and what we say as a group isn’t always translated at team leader meetings.”

Maura’s perception of team meetings is different in that “I personally feel we’ve always been a team and share things.” She believes that everybody’s opinion is valued and is in disagreement with Oscar and Wilma about the team leader: “She (team leader) goes back to the next team leader meeting and expresses what we talked about.” Maura also said that over time she has become “more assertive and vocal – I’m gonna be heard.”

Nancy said that team “meetings, most of the time, are going to be talking about kids” and that they’re “informal where people just express concerns or in some cases, we discuss items from team leader meeting.”

Data from the questionnaires revealed disagreement among team members that consensus means all members agree. Three members strongly agreed that they can express their thoughts at team meeting while Oscar strongly disagreed. Oscar is the only member who strongly disagreed that he participates in decisions made by the team. However, Wilma’s indication on the questionnaire that she participates in decisions made by the team seems to be a contradiction to her interview response that she was not part of the decision making process. Team meeting discourse data revealed that both Wilma and

Oscar participated in team decisions. However, there were decisions made where input from Wilma and Oscar was ignored or overruled by the team leader.

Data from eighth grade team meetings support concerns expressed in the interviews. Similar to the sixth grade, eighth grade team meetings were primarily spent discussing students and parent meetings. Team members expressed concern about the number of parent meetings as well as the number of parent meetings scheduled during class time. Response from the team leader was “If it’s (parent meeting) during a class period, one of us has to go and someone has to cover. This is what we’ve got and we have to go.” When Oscar asked “When’s it gonna end or is it?” The team leader responded “I don’t know. I don’t know” and continued with the meeting.

When Maura attempted to ask a question, the team leader response was “Wait a minute! Hold on! I’m not done!” When discussion revolved around student behavioral issues, the team leader often interrupted other team members giving directives such as “Well, we have to stop that!” or “You come to my class and take him.” When the team was discussing what consequences might be assigned to students with behavioral issues, the team leader responded, “It’ll never happen!” and “We (team leaders) were basically told (by administration) to handle discipline issues at the team level.” When Oscar and Wilma expressed their frustration at having tried everything to discipline certain students and wanted help from administration, the team leader said, “We have to handle it!” and continued with the meeting.

Interview data revealed a difference of opinion about team communication. Questionnaire data supported the interview data. Team meeting discourse data revealed a team leader who did interrupt others and did run team meetings according to her agenda.

She tended to tailor team discussion toward her needs and her presumption of administrative response in particular situations. Communication on this team took a “talk at” rather than a “talk with” posture.

B. Common Planning Time and Team Focus

“Effective teams are disciplined in maintaining their focus. During common planning time teams manage their time, establish performance goals, and engage in curriculum coordination, coordination of student assignments, assessments, and feedback, parental contact and involvement, and contact with other building resource staff” (NMSA, 2005, p. 143).

Although administration had given a directive that team common planning time be used as curriculum/team time, team meeting discourse data revealed that all teams use common planning time primarily to discuss individual students and meet with parents. Team procedures per se are discussed in the Team Norms section.

Sixth Grade Team

During the interview, individual sixth grade team members expressed their perception of team meetings with phrases such as, “Team meeting depends on what’s coming up. We have parent meetings. It depends on what needs to be addressed.” Also “We don’t set an agenda because it changes. We spend a lot of time waiting for people (to arrive at the meeting). We need to get team time and planning time back into our team time. The only agenda that seems to work is when G’s (principal) there and we have a purpose.” Taken together, these indicate difficulty in establishing and maintaining team focus.

According to questionnaire data, Melinda and Ben agreed that sufficient time is available to meet together. However Yolanda and Pamela do not agree with that. Questionnaire data also revealed that all team members agreed that the team does not have rules for working together, that the team does not go through the self-evaluation process once a year, that only Pamela and Yolanda believe that self-evaluation is important to the team concept.

Team meeting discourse data supported the interview data and some of the questionnaire data. During one team meeting, while regrouping students for more heterogeneous classes, the special education case manager interrupted to update the team about serious incidents regarding two special needs children. This is one instance of interruptions being allowed during a substantive discussion.

At another team meeting while Yolanda was expressing concern about the advisory period every Wednesday, she was interrupted by someone who asked about student grades, reported information from a team leader meeting, and then continued with a discussion about specifics from a Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting. The meeting continued with a disagreement about a monetary stipend for team leaders and speculation about department head positions in the new middle school. After some time spent confirming parent conference dates, the focus of the meeting returned to Yolanda's original concern about the advisory period. There was no resolution to Yolanda's concern by the end of the meeting.

One team meeting was very focused. The principal attended the meeting where a new teacher evaluation process was explained and individual and team goals were

discussed. This illustrates Pamela's perception that the team acts differently in the presence of the principal.

At another team meeting, conversation was often random as team members addressed student concerns, planned for student activities before winter break, received guidance updates, and made comments about a former teacher. What actually took place at team meetings confirmed individual teacher perceptions about the use of common planning time and the lack of team focus.

Seventh Grade Team

According to Laura, "We multi-task." In Barbara's words, "We are organized chaos and we know it. There's a lot of things going on at once." For Fran, there are times when "I wish we had finished that or I wish we had time to do this huge wish list. I know with NELMS coming in this year, we're really trying to focus and stay on task." She added "We realize that most of our meetings have been overtaken by kids and we have special ed meetings scheduled a lot."

Mark does not view team time as being productive. Recall that Mark had said Fran was trying to do too many things that were not team related, that Laura and Barbara were in conversation, and he was left sitting on the sidelines.

Questionnaire data indicated that only two team members believe that sufficient time is available for teachers to meet but three team members believe that it is important to meet regularly. Only Laura, the team leader, believes that the team has rules for working together. The team does not go through the self-evaluation process but only two believe that self-evaluation is important to the team concept.

Team meeting discourse data revealed that the team did focus on student related issues some of the time. However, during one meeting, Fran asked if there was anything to discuss before she ran downstairs. No one answered so she said "Alright, I'm gonna run downstairs real quick." As soon as Fran left, Barbara asked "Can I talk about changing our schedule a little bit?" There was a brief discussion but no decision was made. After that, discussion related to an afternoon sports program, Reese's cookies, and a movie all while someone was whistling in the background. When Fran returned to the meeting, she and Barbara spent time on the phone with a parent.

Much time in two other team meetings was spent addressing student issues. However, one person was hole-punching papers during the discussion. No plans were put into place for those students who were experiencing academic and home problems. Part of team time was spent sharing stories about two automobile accidents and stories about skiing.

There was one meeting where the team focused on planning a school board presentation regarding the team and its plan for using the week long Nature's Classroom experience to develop an integrated unit. The principal attended this meeting and offered his suggestions for the presentation. This was the only observed team meeting where the team maintained focus.

With the exception of the example above, the pattern at team meetings was to move from one subject to another. At times, the subject was dealing with a problem yet no plans were put in place for resolution. There was no focus topic at the beginning of meetings and no concluding topic. Others in the school as well as the seventh grade team itself perceive the seventh grade team as being a high functioning team. However,

observed team meetings uncovered a team that did not accomplish anything of any substance which is not reflective of teacher beliefs. Other people have made assumptions and formed perceptions on team member personalities and team interactions and not on what takes place during common planning time.

Eighth Grade Team

According to Nancy, “We’re a very kid focused team. A typical meeting most of the time is going to be talking about kids.” Maura said that if the principal or special education case manager were not attending the meeting then issues were brought up and discussed.

Oscar described team planning time as “We just kind of sit around where you kind of throw out ideas or we’ll talk about kids. It’s pretty much fly by the seat of our pants, the meetings.” With reference to time spent discussing students, he added “That part of team meeting is great in that you really do get to know the kids better and that’s the most important part of it.” However, Oscar indicated that “organizing time so that you have it to discuss other things is a challenge.”

Wilma described team planning somewhat differently, “I don’t think we come to closure on a lot. At a lot of meetings, I leave feeling more frustrated than when we walked in. I would like us to come to some sort of closure that’s satisfying to all before we move on to either another student or another subject.”

On the questionnaire two team members agreed that they felt there was sufficient time for teachers to meet which they believe is important while two team members were unsure that there was sufficient time to meet. Data also revealed that two team members believe that the team does not have rules for working together; two team members were

unsure. Only the team leader is unsure that the team goes through a self-evaluation process; the other team members indicated that the team does not go through a self-evaluation process yet all members, except the team leader, agreed that self-evaluation is important to the team concept.

Eighth grade team meeting time was spent primarily discussing student behavioral issues and for three members, the lack of administrative support in dealing with student behavior. In fact, the team did spend almost one entire meeting expressing frustration with what they believe was lack of administrative support in dealing with student behavioral issues. Time was also spent confirming dates of parent conferences and expressing frustration with the number of parent conferences. Concern was also expressed regarding parent conferences being scheduled during instructional time. One meeting was devoted to examining the CAT scores for their students. There was no concluding topic to any of the observed meetings.

Team meetings reflected individual team member beliefs about the use of common planning time. More common planning time was spent complaining about various issues rather than working on solutions or performing other team tasks such as curriculum planning.

C. Shared Vision

“A successful middle school starts with a shared vision developed and implemented under the guidance and nurturing of school leaders in collaboration with all the various stake holders: students, teachers, parents, board of education members, central office personnel, and community members” (NMSA, 2005, p. 143).

Although a shared vision as defined by NMSA (2005) involves the entire school community, teams interpreted a “shared vision” as team goals. Team goals for each team were written by the principal using individual team member goals. Team goals were not, in most cases, related to the individual team member goals.

Interview data did not relate to a shared vision of the school community and only minimally related to a shared vision of each team. Teachers mainly shared their individual perceptions of what they believed their team goals were.

Sixth Grade Team

According to Melinda in the interview, the team has a shared goal of preparing interdisciplinary units. For Yolanda, the team goals are “trying to get team time and planning time back into team time” and helping students so they “don’t have such a rough time adjusting (to grade 6).”

Pamela mentioned that the principal had taken the individual goals of team members and had written the team goals from those. Pamela added “We never sat down and said this is our goal. And our team goal is assessment and that wasn’t even in my goals. I think our team goal should be teaming. We need to assess ourselves.” Ben said that “most of us are looking at technology in the classroom and we’re looking at alternative testing.”

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members agreed with objectives they are trying to achieve with students. All team are unsure about the statement that the team has specific goals for student achievement. Three team members agreed that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement yet all team members agreed that the purpose

of teams is to do interdisciplinary units. However, none of these were discussed at team meetings.

Team meeting discourse data were not related to a shared vision of the school community or to the individually perceived team goals. Pamela's vision of team assessment was not addressed nor was Ben's vision of investigating the use of technology in the classroom and looking at alternative testing. Melinda's vision of interdisciplinary units was evidenced by student work displayed in the team area.

An unstated shared vision of meeting the needs of students and helping students (Yolanda's vision) was not discussed per se at team meetings but was observed in how the team resolved concerns the team had related to particular students.

Seventh Grade Team

During the interview process, the major goal for three team members was to create an integrated unit related to Nature's Classroom. Mark said that the team did not have written goals.

Questionnaire data showed that two team members agreed with objectives they are trying to achieve with students while two team members are unsure. Three team members agreed that the purpose of teaming is to improve student achievement. Only the team leader agreed that the purpose of teaming is to do interdisciplinary units; other team members were unsure. However, two team members agreed that the team has specific goals for student achievement; Mark was unsure and Barbara disagreed.

Team meeting discourse data were not directly related to the integrated unit mentioned in the interviews. There were references to when NELMS would meet with the team to provide support while the team worked on the unit. At one meeting, with the

assistance of the principal, the team planned a presentation for the school board which highlighted the Nature's Classroom unit. Mark voiced his concern that he did not understand how his curriculum related to the integrated unit but there was no substantive discussion to help him. At other observed meetings, the unit was not discussed. There was no mention of objectives for students or how the team proposed to improve student achievement.

Eighth Grade Team

Interview data revealed that Wilma was the only member who mentioned team goals, "One of them (team goals) is an interdisciplinary project to go with the Washington, DC trip." According to Maura, "We don't have any set goals in writing" yet a school document indicated that Assessment/Integration was the eighth grade team goal. Nancy, the team leader, said, "I don't know as we have them (team goals). We did talk about goals this year. I can't even remember what we wrote. It might have had to do with the integrated unit."

Oscar did not mention team goals even when asked. Instead he focused on his dissatisfaction with the team leader and implied that she was a barrier to formulating team goals because of her own agenda. He was not clear on what her agenda included.

Except for Oscar, questionnaire data showed that the team agrees with objectives they are trying to achieve with students and except for Wilma, that the team has specific goals for student achievement. Three team members agreed that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement; one team member was unsure. Only two members indicated that the purpose of teams was to do interdisciplinary units.

Team meeting discourse data were not directly related to team goals. However the team made an attempt to use the CAT scores to determine student achievement. For some reason Oscar had a copy of their students' CAT scores which were very low. The team spent most of the meeting comparing individual student scores to actual student performance in school. The general perception of the team was that if they could explain the low student scores, they might be able to develop a plan to improve student achievement. However, specific goals for student achievement were not discussed. The only reference to how the team might improve student achievement was related to finding a way for students to be motivated to complete homework assignments. The team believed that the CAT scores and the state test scores were a direct reflection of students not completing homework. Nancy also made a comment that the state test did not reflect what the students were learning.

D. Team Norms

“Effective teams are able to define and commit to norms that guide how the team operates” (NMSA, 2005, p. 143).

The teams in the study did not have defined norms that guide how each team operates. For this study, in order to recognize team norms, interview, questionnaire, and team meeting discourse data were examined to reveal a structure for team operation. For example, did the teams have rules for working together? Do team members share responsibilities? Were any consistent behavioral patterns evident?

Bob, a member of all three teams, described the teams as follows, “None of the three (teams) is keeping a written agenda. We’ve got a lot of (parent) meetings and if we didn’t have the (parent) meetings, we’d be complaining that we’ve got parents who don’t

care. We start (meetings) with common concerns and we spend a lot of time talking about children.” Bob did emphasize that “We’re lucky to be able to meet everyday. Many schools don’t.”

Sixth Grade Team

Sixth grade team member interview data echoed what Bob said. Melinda said, “For the most part we have parent meetings. We discuss common concerns; team meeting depends on what’s going on.”

Similarly Yolanda said, “It (team meeting) starts off a little bit informal. We take notes. We don’t set an agenda because it changes.”

Pamela indicated that there was no agenda set for team meeting but said, “My feeling is if we had an agenda all the time, there would always be a focus. We spend a lot of time meeting with parents. There is no one in control at meetings.”

Ben said, “The unfortunate thing now is there’s probably no need for agendas because it’s mostly parent meetings. And that’s terrible and the only agenda that we seem to work is when Ted’s (principal) here and we have a purpose.” Ben also said that team members were trying to get along and that they were more tolerant of each other.

Questionnaire data supported the interview data in that three team members agreed that most of team time is spent discussing students. All team members agreed that most of team time is spent conferencing with parents. Two team members agreed that there are explicit rules for student conduct; two team members are unsure. All team members reported that the team does not go through a self-evaluation process yet only two team members indicated that team self-evaluation is important to the team concept. Only Ben felt that the team shares responsibilities such as facilitator and note taker for

team meetings. Pamela does take notes at team meetings and places them in a team binder. Pamela's notes were very clear and detailed yet there was no apparent review of these notes by team members at other meetings. Because of the caliber of the team notes, the researcher was able to conclude what happened at team meetings that she did not attend. All team members indicated that the team does not have rules for working together.

Team meeting discourse data supported interview and questionnaire data. Team time was spent discussing student concerns and upcoming dates of parent conferences. Meetings began when all members were present and a team member made a comment or asked a question. Team members addressed whatever was most pressing at the time. Meetings ended when everyone stood up to leave because students were returning to class. There was no agenda for any of the observed meetings and no evidence of written rules to guide the team.

Seventh Grade Team

According to interview data, team meetings were described as chaotic with a lot going on and several conversations occurring simultaneously. A written agenda was not prepared for team meetings. However, the team used Laura's calendar to enter items needing attention and Barbara recorded team meeting discussion on an agenda form which is filed in the team binder. The seventh grade team notes were sketchy and certainly not of the same caliber as the sixth team notes. The seventh grade team notes were primarily a listing of dates or a list of student names, and sometimes a topic was listed. The researcher, in most cases, could not determine what had been discussed at team meetings she did not attend.

Questionnaire data revealed that the two team members agreed that team has explicit rules for student conduct; one team member disagreed and one team member was unsure. Only Laura, the team leader, indicated that the team has rules for working together. However, there were no written rules in evidence. Two team members agreed that most team time is spent discussing students. Laura believes that much of team time is spent conferencing with parents while Fran and Mark disagreed with that and Barbara is unsure. Team members indicated that they do not go through a self-evaluation process once a year and only two agreed that self-evaluation is important to the team concept. Laura (team leader) is unsure while Barbara (team secretary) agreed that the team shares responsibilities. Fran and Mark disagreed with them.

Team meeting discourse data supported interview and questionnaire data. Often there were two or three conversations going on simultaneously, members sometimes left the meeting, students were discussed, and upcoming parent conferences were confirmed. The team also spent time in an attempt to set up days to work on the orienteering curriculum. However, this was not resolved in any of the observed meetings.

With multiple conversations taking place, team members went from one subject to another with no main focus and in many cases, no decisions being made. Team meetings had no official beginning or end.

Eighth Grade Team

According to interview data, much of team time is spent discussing students and meeting with parents. There is no written agenda: "We just sit around and throw out ideas" or "bring up student concerns." Wilma said, "I don't think we come to closure a lot. We can be talking about a student and it quickly gets turned around to her (team

leader) issues. We get interrupted a lot (by the team leader).” Oscar said, “We fly by the seat of our pants. We talk about kids.”

Questionnaire data supported interview data regarding the amount of team time spent discussing students and conferencing with parents. All members, except the team leader who is unsure, disagreed with the statements: the team goes through a self-evaluation process and self-evaluation is important to the team concept. Only the team leader indicated that the team shares responsibilities. The team leader and Maura believe that the team has rules for working together but there were no written rules in evidence.

Team meeting discourse data revealed that much of team time was spent discussing students, especially behavioral issues. Time was also spent determining who would attend parent conferences scheduled during instructional time. Dates for upcoming parent conferences were also confirmed. Discourse data also supported concerns that were expressed regarding members being interrupted during discussion as well as changing the topic being discussed. For example, one team member wanted to ask a question and the team leader firmly told her to wait.

There were no written agendas for any of the observed team meetings. Maura took team notes which were even less informative than the seventh grade team notes. Names and dates were often scattered all over a page with no indication of what any of it meant. From these team notes the researcher could not determine what had been discussed at team meetings, even the ones she had attended. Team meetings began when someone made a comment and there was no closure to any of the observed team meetings.

Curriculum, Instruction, Multiple Teaching and Learning Approaches

“Teachers who recognize and honor the wide diversity among young adolescents are able to maximize learning with a (relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory) curriculum” and provide “developmentally responsive approaches to teaching and learning that respond to the diversity among today’s young adolescents” (NMSA, 2005, p. 113).

Interview data provided individual perceptions of a middle school curriculum and how that curriculum should be delivered. Questionnaire data revealed individual perceptions regarding curriculum coordination across grade levels and disciplines, teacher involvement in curriculum decisions, and curriculum integration. Team meeting discourse data were examined for references to curriculum and instruction.

Bob spoke about an approach to one integrated project, “It might not have anything to do with the curriculum. We kinda just pieced it altogether and it wasn’t effective. We haven’t done well and I think we need leadership in that area. I don’t think we’ve been instructed on how to do it.” Bob added, “I’ve learned in the last few years that our methods need to change, to differentiate more than we have.” One of Bob’s goals is to become more informed about differentiated instruction.

Sixth Grade Team

Melinda said that a team goal was interdisciplinary units. “We work on the history schedule in our team. We do several main units like Egypt, Greece, Rome, Medieval.” According to Melinda, participation in these units is an individual decision. “We go over it at team meeting but it’s up to the individual teacher, what their comfort level is on an activity.” Melinda also mentioned having World War II veterans visit

classes, attending plays that relate to the curriculum, and a field trip to a maple sugaring farm.

Yolanda's interview data echoed Melinda's. She did add "I don't know if we go deep enough." She also mentioned that the principal had arranged for one team planning period per day and "that was supposed to be curriculum/team time. It doesn't happen."

Ben mentioned the same integrated units as Melinda and Yolanda. He mentioned that his science classes are all hands-on activities. He hates lecture. Ben also mentioned the importance of heterogeneous grouping of students, something all sixth grade team members agree with. He also expressed his concern that the team "does not spend a lot of time planning or refining the (integrated) units."

Pamela expressed the same thoughts about curriculum as her teammates. However, recall that Pamela was going to ask the principal to attend curriculum team meetings every week and not just every other week as is currently the case. Pamela expressed concern that the student work required for some units was excessive in her opinion.

Questionnaire data supported the interview data. Questionnaire data revealed that all team members agreed that they are involved in curriculum decisions. Two team members agreed and two team members are unsure that curriculum integration is important to teaming. Two team members agreed and two team members are unsure that curriculum integration is discussed at least once a month. All team members agreed that the purpose of teaming is to do interdisciplinary units. One team member agreed that there is curriculum coordination across grade levels and disciplines while Pamela and Yolanda strongly disagreed with this and Melinda was unsure.

With the exception of the principal discussing curriculum templates in general terms, team meeting discourse did not relate to curriculum.

The sixth grade team is the only team with several integrated units that are challenging. Although Ben has some grasp of the NMSA (2005) curriculum recommendations, there was not a team coordinated plan for curriculum observed. Since the integrated units were not discussed/evaluated at team meetings, the researcher suspected that they were developed outside of team time. Perhaps they were developed during lunch time or during individual planning time. With several field trips and classroom activities, the curriculum is exploratory to some degree.

Seventh Grade Team

Interview data revealed that the team seems to be in the beginning stages of integrating curriculum. Laura mentioned that the team is beginning to work on an orienteering unit. "That's something the science teacher wanted to do for a long time and we have been talking about it and now we're really working towards getting all our subjects involved in the orienteering unit."

Barbara agreed with Laura but added that time was a factor in planning, "Without the time to do the planning, without the flexibility within the building and scheduling to have the experiences, we are restrained and I would love to see a half day every three weeks (to work on curriculum)" and "If they (teams) were given the time, they would come up with some incredible things."

Fran viewed curriculum somewhat differently, "You may teach math but you're not just responsible for math. You should be connecting it to (other subjects) and that way they (students) can understand that, oh I'm not just in math. They see it as a broader

class.” She also said that students should be exposed to “many different avenues” and that “curriculum should connect to them (students).” Fran has a basic understanding of the NMSA (2005) recommendations for curriculum with regard to student involvement and that subject boundaries should not exist.

Mark, the first year teacher, who hoped to soon be teaching high school stated: “The curriculum from elementary school through middle school worries too much about fostering a community and kids don’t have the basics.” With regard to NELMS and the orienteering unit, Mark said “It is still in its infancy. I feel like we’ve done really little with that.” He also added, “I could give two ***** about NELMS stuff when I have to find out what I have to teach tomorrow.”

Questionnaire data supported the interview data. Questionnaire data revealed that two team members agreed that teachers are involved in curriculum decisions; one team member disagreed and one team member is unsure. Two team members agreed that curriculum integration is important to teaming; Barbara disagreed and Mark was unsure. All team members, except Barbara, agreed that curriculum integration is discussed once a month. All members disagreed that teachers from the same discipline meet regularly and share what they are doing yet three team members agreed that this is important. In fact Fran stated in her interview that “It was nice to spend a whole day with Pamela at a math workshop. We got a chance to talk about the math program.” Three team members were unsure about the statement that the purpose of teaming is to do interdisciplinary units; one team member agreed.

Team meeting discourse data revealed that curriculum was discussed in a general way at a very superficial level. While the team planned for a presentation to the school

board, the focus of conversation was Nature's Classroom, a program where the students and the teachers spend a week together away from the school. During this week, the prime focus is team building around a science theme. With reference to the school board presentation, Barbara said, "It's important that we're all saying we're integrating." The principal added, "It's also showing how you integrate." Mark expressed some doubt, "I don't know how much Nature's classroom has to do with my curriculum." It is the orienteering part of the Nature's Classroom experience that will become the integrated unit. Planning when to work on the orienteering unit was also discussed but no time frame was set and there was no discussion of instructional methods.

Eighth Grade

Interview data revealed that with respect to integrated units, Nancy seemed to be struggling, "I feel like I'm trying to contrive some way that I can make a connection that maybe just isn't a natural connection." She added, "A big integration unit we are currently working on or trying to work on with help from NELMS is taking Washington, DC (a class trip) as our culminating activity and our theme" then added, "Working on units, we're not good at that." When Oscar's doing his immigration unit Nancy will bring in circle graphs and use the data he collects from students thus making a connection between their disciplines.

Maura said "I've tried many times to have interdisciplinary units going on especially with science fair projects." She seemed to express her frustration about a power plant project that she was very excited about. "I do a big power plant project and I would love to turn this into an interdisciplinary unit. They (students) build a scale model. They have to make a pamphlet. They have to make a poster and they have to research

information.” Maura emphasized that one of her jobs is to “get them (students) prepared for the high school. So I really personally feel that I have to focus on that.”

Oscar mentioned that the integrated arts teacher “works with us about developing common themes. Science is hands-on and experimentation. We take ‘em (students) to plays” and “I do a lot of things where we get out of the classroom. We study the stone walls and how the town has changed since colonial times.”

Wilma expressed her beliefs about integrated curriculum, “We don’t have a lot of flexibility in our schedule and we don’t do a lot of interdisciplinary units as I understand a true middle school would.” However, she added that “One of our (team) goals is an interdisciplinary unit to go with our Washington, DC trip. A lot of our meetings seem to be tied up with parents so I haven’t seen a lot of time that’s there to allow for curriculum use or to talk about interdisciplinary, to talk about field trips, or what we’re doing individually that another person can tag onto or share from, or learn from, or contribute to.” Wilma did mention that she worked on two topics with the integrated arts teacher where they complemented each other’s classrooms.

Team members viewed integrated curriculum from a thematic and content driven perspective rather than in relation to the student.

Questionnaire data indicated that three team members are unsure about curriculum integration being important to teaming. Two team members indicated that curriculum integration is discussed at least once a month. Questionnaire data revealed that three team members do not see curriculum coordination across grade levels or disciplines yet one team member agreed and three team members were unsure that curriculum coordination is important. Maura believes that teachers are involved in

curriculum decisions while the other team members disagreed with this. Maura and Nancy indicated that the purpose of teaming is to do interdisciplinary units while Wilma disagreed and Oscar is unsure.

Team meeting discourse data did not directly relate to the interview and questionnaire data. Nancy expressed concern that “There is no instructional time before the state testing” and “I’m not sure what the purpose of the state test is.” Nancy did mention to Oscar that “I’m going to skip circle graphs (now) and do them when you do your immigration (unit).”

Maura did not talk about curriculum during the observed team meetings.

Oscar expressed concern about parent meetings taking away from instructional time, “They’re taking over our program.” He also expressed his concern about being “behind” in his curriculum, “It’s (immigration unit) going to be later than usual because of the advisory (program). I’m about two weeks behind and the testing we had; I’m way behind, more than I have been in the past.”

When discussion focused on student abilities and work ethic, Wilma added “I’m willing to ditch half of my curriculum, depth rather than breadth, if these kids can make some sort of a commitment.”

Comments made by team members at team meetings indicated that team members view curriculum in terms of separate disciplines and not in the same way as recommended by NMSA (2005).

Flexible Scheduling

“Since teams have a large block of time with their students, teachers are able to adjust and rearrange the instructional time as they see necessary in order to achieve the team’s instructional goals” (NMSA, 2005, p. 149).

Olde Town Middle School operates under a fixed length eight class period day. Each class period is forty-seven minutes long and teams can rearrange/adjust their instructional time as they choose. Teams can choose what to do with these fixed length periods and all grade levels have the ability to create large blocks of instructional time. The sixth grade has created large blocks of time for instruction while the seventh and eighth grade teams have not.

Additional classes that affect flexibility are music, art, foreign languages, and advisory. At issue with all teams is the advisory program which eliminates one instructional period per week. Currently the students meet with their advisors briefly each morning for attendance and announcements. Every Wednesday there is a full class period scheduled for the advisory program. Advisory is never scheduled for period four because of reading classes and foreign language classes offered to middle school students at the high school.

Interview data uncovered individual perceptions of and attitudes toward flexible scheduling.

Sixth Grade Team

During the interview, Yolanda mentioned that the rotating advisory period interfered with the team block scheduling, “We really love block scheduling but it (advisory) might come one day when we already have two blocks so it’s going to take

one of those out” and added “when we do our blocks, we need to check everybody’s schedule.”

Pamela mentioned that the rotating advisory period conflicts with the team block schedule and also said, “Maybe we shouldn’t have picked Wednesday (for advisory) because we can only block two days a week, Tuesday and Wednesday and when that (advisory) happens, we have to shrink everything up.”

Ben and Melinda did not mention block scheduling. All team members indicated that they wanted their students grouped heterogeneously for instruction.

Questionnaire data did not relate to flexible scheduling.

One team meeting was devoted to rearranging student schedules to create heterogeneous class groupings. Heterogeneous grouping was a major priority for this team since students were grouped homogeneously when they arrived in sixth grade.

During one team meeting Yolanda expressed her concern about the rotating advisory period “cutting into our block every single Wednesday and I’m especially concerned.” However, her concern was not addressed by the team even though Pamela had also addressed the same concern during her interview.

The sixth grade perceived the advisory program as placing constraints on their flexible scheduling and these perceived constraints may not be real considering the large daily block of instructional time for this team.

Seventh Grade Team

Interview data revealed that Barbara had concerns about the lack of flexibility in the existing school schedule. With reference to the new middle school under construction she said, “Another important factor would be that staff members have a strong powerful

say in what the day looks like because they're the ones that know what needs to be done. And right now obviously we're driven by the high school schedule. We need to be flexing our time and changing how things look." Barbara viewed the organizational structure of the school as a barrier to flexible scheduling.

Fran mentioned that "We're flexible and a lot of things will happen in seventh grade that may not happen in some of the other grades."

For Mark, "One thing we're very good at is moving kids around so if a kid's having conflicts in one class, who can we switch him with in another class to mitigate that? Those classes are more productive now (after moving a student) and that's huge." Mark viewed flexibility in terms of individual students and classes rather than the broad view of increasing blocks of instructional time. Mark's prime focus as a first year teacher is covering the established curriculum during the assigned class periods. He is more concerned about completing the curriculum than the structure of the day.

Questionnaire data did not relate to flexible scheduling.

During one team meeting, Fran explained why a new class schedule was being created, "So we can teach kids different times of the day. So you don't always have (particular students) at the end of the day." Mark responded, "Do you care about that at all? I'm finding it's the same." Fran disagreed. Barbara added, "This would allow us to see our morning kids in the afternoon and our afternoon kids in the morning." No decision was made regarding the proposed schedule change.

Even though this team has the capability to create larger blocks of time for instruction, team members blame the existing school structure rather than do anything more than suggest a change in the order of the class periods.

Eighth Grade Team

Wilma was the only member who mentioned scheduling during the interview process, “We don’t have a lot of flexibility in our schedule.”

Questionnaire data did not relate to flexible scheduling nor did team meeting discourse data.

At team meetings, flexible scheduling was not discussed. During the times that the researcher was in the building, observation revealed a team that operates under traditional fixed length instructional periods.

Assessment and Evaluation

“NMSA urges educators to conduct continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures in order to provide evidence about every student’s learning progress. Assessment is the process of estimating a child’s progress toward an objective and using that information to help students continue their learning. On the other hand, evaluation is the process of using data and standards to judge the quality of progress or level of achievement” (NMSA, 2005, p. 127).

Sixth Grade Team

During the interview, Melinda alluded to alternative forms of assessment, “Ben does a lyre, the culminating activity of a sound unit. The culminating activity for the medieval unit is the making of a catapult and a catapult competition. Students create their own coat of arms. Another class creates large paper dolls (lord, lady, or peasant) and does research on the person and the kids do a production of MacBeth.” Melinda’s remarks show an awareness of curriculum content in other team members’ classrooms.

Yolanda mentioned that students “can choose how they are going to show me what they know. They’re not limited too let’s read chapters 3, 4, 5 and answer the questions. It takes longer and I’ve found it a real big challenge as far as (writing) my rubrics.”

Pamela mentioned assessment from a different point of view, “Never mind how we assess kids. We need to assess ourselves (the team) and what we’re (the team) teaching and how we’re (the team) doing that.” With that comment, Pamela demonstrated that she understands the importance of team self-evaluation and the effect the team has on student learning.

Ben said, “They (students) have to do a portfolio that has all of those things that they collect all year. I do some of the choosing but they do a lot of the choosing also.”

Questionnaire data did not relate directly to assessment and evaluation. However, team members were unsure if that they have goals for student achievement. Three team members agreed that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement while Melinda was unsure. Three team members disagreed with the statement that academic achievement has decreased with teaming; one team member was unsure. There was no written evidence of specific goals for student achievement or methods for improving student achievement.

Team meeting discourse data were not directly related to assessment and evaluation. However, in placing students in heterogeneous groupings, the team did assess the perceived ability level of each student.

Seventh Grade Team

There were no references to assessment and evaluation in the interview data.

According to the questionnaire data, two team members agreed and two were unsure that the team has specific goals for student achievement and that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement. However, there was no evidence of specific goals for student achievement or methods for improving student achievement. All team members disagreed with the statement that student achievement has decreased with teaming.

At one team meeting, Fran expressed her frustration with student scores on a recent test, "I don't know what happened but they (students) bombed the last test, bombed it really, really bad." There was no indication that she had examined student work to determine why the students had not done well on the test. Looking at student work might cause her to reflect on her instructional approaches. Barbara only mentioned an alternative way to make accommodations for special needs children. Assessment and evaluation were not discussed in any meaningful way at team meetings.

Eighth Grade Team

During the interview Nancy mentioned "We are struggling with the new grading system." This new grading system allows for letter grades of A, B, C, I. If a student does not receive a grade of C or better, he/she receives an I (incomplete) and with the help and support of the teacher is able raise that grade to at least a C.

Maura mentioned that the new grading system "is a little bit of an adjustment for me. We're working the kinks out this year, giving a chance for a student to go back and learn what they missed from the unit before."

With the exception of Oscar and Wilma, team members agreed that the team has specific goals for student achievement. Three team members agreed that the purpose of

teams is to improve student achievement; Oscar was unsure. All team members disagreed with the statement that student achievement has decreased with teaming.

During team meeting Nancy expressed her disappointment that on a recent quiz only eight students passed and the remaining students received incomplete grades. Nothing was discussed related to Nancy or other team members examining student work to inform practice.

Others expressed their concern that only a few students had made an effort to change an incomplete grade to a letter grade. Discussion did not include teacher initiated support to help the student improve his/her grade. This particular grading system is designed so that the teacher gives the student as much time and support necessary to demonstrate understanding. It appeared as though the team was placing full responsibility on the student to change the incomplete grade.

Wilma mentioned "They (students) get lower in ability every single year. I've seen a trend going on a good three to four to five years." One meeting was spent discussing the low scores on the CAT test for this eighth grade class.

In some sense discussion related to the CAT scores was an assessment of student achievement but the team used the scores to justify class placements (homogeneous) and honor roll status of students.

Adult Advocate

"Successful schools for young adolescents are characterized by, among other things, an adult advocate for every student, one who is knowledgeable about young adolescent development in general, who self-evidently enjoys working with young adolescents, and who comes to know students well as individuals" (NMSA, 2005, p. 64).

Interview data showed that most team members focused on the current structure of the advisory program rather than the purpose of an advisory program curriculum. There were several team members who did mention the advisory program in the context of getting to know their students well.

Sixth Grade Team

During the interview, Melinda referred to the school advisory period in a very curt manner, "I preferred it when it was shorter." insinuating that she did not support the current structure of the program.

The advisory period was lengthened to forty-five minutes because the teachers wanted more time with their advisees rather than the previous schedule of 10 to 12 minutes daily.

Yolanda expressed her concern that this new schedule sometimes interfered with the sixth grade block schedule. Yolanda also said, "All of a sudden there was this big push for advisory" and was not sure if it was "a NELMS thing or for reaccreditation." In her opinion, "We haven't got it down to where it should be. I'm sure there's a way to do it where it's effective." This implies that she does not believe the current program to be effective. Yolanda further added that students "need to establish relationships. They need other adults who they can talk with. We really do need to be there for that. They need good role models who will help them make good decisions. I think you need to be consistent and have empathy if you work with kids this age."

Pamela said, "The only thing I don't like about advisory is the rotating through the day because it interferes with the block schedule." She looked forward to moving to the new school when "We'll have more flexible schedules."

Ben reminisced about how close he was to his advisees in the past two years but doesn't believe that he will be as close to his current group of advisees. He explained that the reason for this was that two advisory groups are assigned to one classroom when they meet. Classrooms are shared and at times, some advisors are assigned to other duties during the advisory period. This means that there are times when one advisor is responsible for two groups of advisees. Ben explained that the advisory program cannot be informal and personal and thus does not serve the purpose for which it was intended.

Questionnaire data revealed that the entire team believes that the purpose of teams is to make a small school within a large school, i.e., know students better.

At team meeting Yolanda expressed concern about the weekly advisory period, "I need some help because I'm concerned about the advisory every Wednesday because it's cutting into our block every single Wednesday." She also requested that advisory be scheduled on a Thursday for one particular week. The response from other team members was "No" because of the specials (classes off team).

While the team was regrouping students for more heterogeneous classes, questions arose concerning one special needs child. Melinda said, with no hesitation, "I'm more than willing to take her, happy to have her in my class."

Ben, being sensitive to one child's home situation, told the team that he had paired this child with another student who is a good role model. He further added, "Hopefully some sort of relationship can come."

Most observed team meeting time was spent discussing parents, parent meetings, and students. There was very little discussion about the advisory program. However, discussions about the family situations of particular students provided information that

would not only allow team members to know the students better but also help team members meet the needs of those students.

Seventh Grade Team

During the interview, Laura explained that “This is the first year we’re doing two advisories in one room” but was more concerned that the weekly advisory takes away a class period. She would rather see the advisory period at the end of the day and said, “We’re looking at that too.”

Barbara said, “Unfortunately we had to sacrifice a functioning academic period for advisory.” She also mentioned a student who had told her that advisory should be at the beginning of the day and then at the end of the day. Barbara continued, “The kids get what should be happening in an advisory program.”

Fran described advisory as starting “in sixth and seventh grade to pilot it and see how it went and the following year, eighth grade was involved. Then it got to a point where we need to do this if we want to be a spotlight school and a true middle school, we needed to do advisory. We’re still working with it but advisory is more that you’re going to do it and this is how it works.”

For Mark “Advisory is a waste of time. It’s almost like I’m stressing out about what we can talk about during advisory. I just don’t think it is productive time. I think advisory is more cumbersome than useful.” Mark does not like losing one class period per week for advisory but would compromise and accept advisory being one period every two weeks.

Questionnaire data showed that two team members agreed, one was unsure, and one strongly disagreed with the statement that the purpose of teaming is to make a small school within a large school, i.e., know students better.

During one observed team meeting, Barbara described what the advisory program was like in the past, “Basically it was just a homework check” to which Mark responded, “I would move to remove advisory every Wednesday.” Fran said, “It should be once a week at the end of the day.” Barbara added that the subject had come up during common concerns meetings, “that some want to put it (advisory) period eight but that does a disservice to band and chorus.” Fran explained to Mark that actual physical space limits how advisory period can be scheduled in the school day.

At another team meeting, there was a brief conversation about advisory period never being scheduled during fourth period.

Eighth Grade Team

Nancy explained “We’re pretty new to advisory. One period a week there’s a full advisory period and we’re still exploring what we’re going to do with that. Some of them (advisory periods) have been games but we’re also addressing some of the school’s goals. One of the things I read about advisory is that it’s a way for kids to connect with at least one adult in the building. I think the kids are connected already to at least one, if not several, adults because we are so small. We don’t need to make a small school within a large school. That’s not so much a part of our advisory but it (advisory) is a good time to do other things.”

Maura explained the advisory schedule similarly to Nancy but added, “Advisory started this year where we are actually giving up one whole class period once a week and

we're still learning. We really had no training. We're learning with the kids which is cool."

Oscar described advisory as "a work in progress. It hasn't been well articulated. When the team was asked what we wanted, we said training, training, training. Tell us how to do it." Oscar added that when the team was asked about a rotating schedule for advisory, the team responded, "not a good idea." Oscar then said, "Well, it's a rotating schedule." Because the middle school shares a few teachers with the high school, Oscar said he "is left with the responsibility of two groups when the shared teacher cannot be at the advisory session." Oscar also said that "stability is a very important thing with advisory and the best time to have advisory is in the morning. We're really just not having a chance to get to know them (students). Sometimes we have 24 students. We continue to ask for training and to try to formalize a curriculum but we're not getting anywhere with it."

Wilma remembered "talking last year when we first started talking about it (advisory) and we said we'd like to do it only if it's going to be a true advisory program and not this half baked cart before the horse kind of thing." She mentioned a request for training but "When I came in this year, it's just what we didn't want it to be. Two advisories in one room doesn't work. With my kids if I have twelve, the idea is for them to get to know me and for me to get to know them so they can go to someone. But when I've got 20 because my person's late or at a meeting, it becomes bookkeeping more than I'm doing anything to get to know these kids." She expressed her frustration that advisory groups were all doing different activities as well as "my understanding was everybody was supposed to be involved and we have administrators who aren't and

teachers who aren't, and that makes it artificial. So it's not a true advisory. It's not what it's sold as."

According to the questionnaire data, two team members agreed and the rest were unsure that the purpose of teams is to make a small school within a large school, i.e., know students better.

At one team meeting, the team leader mentioned that the next theme for advisory was bullying. She indicated that administration had given that directive. At the same meeting, Maura explained that her advisory group was creating cartoon books to illustrate the school principles while Nancy said that her advisory group "did a skit with the principles."

Other team meeting discourse data revealed that Oscar is behind in his curriculum because advisory period eliminates one instructional period per week. Wilma only commented that students were asking why advisory was never held during period four.

Family and Community Partnerships

"One characteristic of a responsive middle level school is family and community partnerships. A goal of good partnerships is on every list for school improvement, but few schools have implemented comprehensive partnership programs" (NMSA, 2005, p. 77).

Although interview data did not specifically relate to family and community partnerships, there were many references to parental contact and involvement.

Sixth Grade Team

Melinda mentioned inviting parents to an activity night at the end of the team's medieval unit. Melinda also mentioned that "Sometimes you can't satisfy a parent just because some of the problems are not at school."

Yolanda said, "We have an awful lot of (parent) meetings in sixth grade and I think it's because it's the parents first experience into the middle school." She did mention that the team has "a parents' night prior to them (students) coming into sixth grade." Yolanda expressed her frustration with parent conferences where "We won't have parents show up" who have missed other scheduled meetings. She added, "That gets stressful."

With reference to team meeting time, Pamela said, "The time that we spend seems to be with parents and parents and parents." She also mentioned that in past years the team has "had a spaghetti supper where the parents and kids come and they meet all of us and the team answers questions before the fifth grade ends."

Ben also mentioned the fifth grade spaghetti supper, "We have a spaghetti dinner where we each put on a presentation for core plus the exploratories (off team classes) plus administration, guidance so that the parents and the kids feel more comfortable." With regard to team meeting time, Ben said, "There's probably no need for agendas because it's mostly parent meetings and that's terrible." He also said that he feels uncomfortable at some parent meetings, "It's our job to convince them (parents) what we're doing is in their child's best interest. And our job is not to shed blame or make them feel uncomfortable and sometimes it's not as diplomatic as it should be." Ben did

add, "The community has always been supportive of their schools and the parents have also been supportive."

Questionnaire data indicated that the team is not confident that parental support exists for teachers. Three team members agreed that most of team time is spent discussing students and conferencing with parents; Melinda was unsure.

Time at team meetings was spent confirming upcoming parent conferences, commenting about family situations, and discussing student concerns.

Seventh Grade Team

During the interview, Laura mentioned that team time is sometimes used for parent conferences. She also mentioned that there have been times when parents have visited and discussed their careers with the students.

Barbara mentioned parents but in relation to poor behavior, "We have been subjected to just horrible behavior from other adults but because they're parents, we don't find a comfortable way to address it."

Fran and Mark did not mention parents or community during their interviews.

Questionnaire data revealed that three team members do not feel that parental support exists for teachers. Two team members agreed and two team members were unsure that much of team time is spent discussing students and one team member agreed, two team members disagreed, and one team member was unsure that team time is spent conferencing with parents.

Team meeting discourse data revealed little discussion about parents while some discussion related to student grades, student interactions, and student behavior.

Eighth Grade Team

During the interview, Nancy did not mention parents but she did mention a team/community job share program where the students visit community businesses and job shadow for one day.

Maura's only comment regarding parents was, "It's personally helpful to meet with them (parents)."

Oscar mentioned that "a lot more parents are in on the (team) meetings." He also said, "We had a parent meeting in August to introduce ourselves and made our expectations known to the parents and in August, we sent a letter home to parents." He also said that teaming "is really positive in terms of meeting with parents."

Wilma said, "A lot of our meetings seem to be tied up with parents" and that parent meetings are most productive when "people put things in a nut shell and not go over every single grade and not go over every single problem and when there is some closure, a plan of action. Parent meetings are easier for me if there's at least one other person there, kind of as a balance just to provide some perspective."

According to questionnaire data, all team members agreed that parental support exists for teachers. All team members strongly agreed that team time is spent discussing students and conferencing with parents.

Team meeting discourse data revealed some consensus regarding the number of parent meetings scheduled. Oscar said, "Is this a wave (of parent meetings) that will end or are we going to lose our little (team) meetings for the rest of the year? They're not only taking over all our meetings, they're taking over class time now." Oscar also expressed his frustration about parent meetings that had to be rescheduled because the

parent did not show up, “I had a sub yesterday first period – disrupts the whole class – I’ve gotta go down (to conference room) – parent doesn’t show up – third time – now we have to go to another meeting.”

Further discussion about scheduled parent meetings on one particular day caused Wilma to question, “Is that ridiculous to anybody or just me? That four (parent meetings) is okay.” Further discussion revealed that the Special Education department had scheduled these parent meetings.

Oscar also expressed his concern and possible parent retribution with having to sign student assignment books. In middle school, parents often request that teachers sign student assignment books. The teacher signature verifies to the parent that the student has recorded the correct assignment. Students often neglect to get their assignment books signed by the teacher. Thus Oscar’s concern: “The parent says you promised that you would help my child out and sign their books. Why aren’t they doing their homework? You aren’t doing your job! How am I going to remember to be chasing all these kids down?” Maura told Oscar that the students are supposed to go to the teacher. Oscar then added, “I’m not gonna remember half of the time and now I’m gonna be blamed cause he (student) doesn’t do his work.”

Time during other team meetings was spent confirming dates of upcoming parent conferences.

Summary

This chapter presented a summary of the interview data, the questionnaire data, and the team meeting discourse data from three middle school interdisciplinary teams. The results found that individual beliefs about middle school and the school practices and

cultural characteristics as delineated by the NMSA (2005) are reflected in interdisciplinary team meetings. Some beliefs such as curriculum integration are somewhat consistent with NMSA recommendations and are reflected in team meetings. Other beliefs such as advisory are inconsistent with NMSA recommendations and are reflected in team meetings. Some beliefs are not reflected in team meetings such as the importance of professional reading, having a shared vision, and creating interdisciplinary units. Analysis of the data are presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter includes the purpose of the study, a summary of the research methods used to collect and analyze the data, and data analysis.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how the substance of interdisciplinary team meetings reflects team member beliefs regarding the middle school and the school practices and cultural characteristics recommended by the NMSA (2005). More specifically, this research was designed to answer the following question:

How does the substance of middle school interdisciplinary team meetings reflect team members' beliefs regarding the middle school and the school practices and cultural characteristics of a successful middle school as identified by the National Middle School Association (2005)?

Three interdisciplinary teams in one northern New England middle school were studied; one team in grade six, one in grade seven, and one in grade eight.

Data were collected through individual audio taped team member interviews, through individual questionnaire responses, and through discourse from audio taped team meetings. As demonstrated by the literature review in Chapter II, little is known about how individual teacher beliefs about middle school are reflected in team meeting discourse. Individual beliefs about middle school could influence how teams function

when implementing NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school.

This research was intended to add to existing knowledge in this area.

To characterize teacher beliefs, categories and codes were created for recorded phrases from individual interview data and team meeting discourse data. The categories and codes were derived from the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school. Questionnaire data were used to verify interview data. A summary of findings was presented in Chapter IV. Upon close examination of the data, what emerge are three teams each in a different stage of team development.

Data Analysis

During the time frame of this research, Olde Town Middle School was under the direction of an interim principal who does not have specific middle school leadership preparation but who supports the middle school philosophy. The interim principal held a position at the school district level for five years prior to this study and agreed to take on the challenge of leading the middle school during the search for a new principal. Prior to this, the school was called a middle school, had interdisciplinary teams in place, and shared a principal with the high school. More importantly, the interim principal agreed to lead the school as it began to implement the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school. For the remainder of this chapter, the interim principal will be referred to as the principal. Prior to taking over as the principal, he had been instrumental in allocating daily common planning time for teachers deemed critical to the success of an interdisciplinary team (Warren & Muth, 1995; NMSA, 2005). Common planning time was built into the school schedule thus providing teams with a consistent time period on a

regular basis to carry out team planning. Teams were given an administrative directive that common planning time was to be used for curriculum/team time.

Olde Town Middle School is a school in transition from a traditional junior high school to a middle school as was indicated by the school principal when he referred to the middle school reform effort the school is undertaking: "We are a middle school in name only. We have a long way to go." Teams had no training related to team functions. Although the organizational structure of the school for many years has been that of interdisciplinary teams, a traditional junior high school philosophy has been embraced up to this point. Only recently has the middle school philosophy been introduced to the entire faculty as the school embarks on the difficult journey to accept and implement the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school (see NMSA [2005] recommendations in Chapter II). A question that surfaces is, how does a school begin this journey?

According to Sue Swaim, Executive Director of the National Middle School Association, "It starts with a vision...a shared vision developed and implemented under the guidance and nurturing of school leadership in collaboration with all the various stakeholders: students, teachers, parents, administrators, board of education members, central office personnel, and community members" (NMSA, 2005, p. 29).

Olde Town Middle School does have a vision in the form of a mission statement: "Olde Town Middle School fosters the development of well-educated citizens in a nurturing learning environment. The school encourages students to meet life's choices and challenges with intellectual curiosity, civic responsibility, and personal integrity" (middle school document). This mission statement, although not in conflict with middle

school philosophy, does not necessarily reflect the major components of the NMSA (2005) recommendations. This could very well be a traditional junior high school mission statement. At Olde Town Middle School, the ability to translate the school's mission statement into team goals (a shared vision) was not happening. Team goals were not developed collaboratively by the team members. The principal required team members to write individual goals and from those individual goals, *he* wrote each team goal.

An important point for the reader to keep in mind is how the teams were initially described by Bob, the teacher assigned to be part of each team, to the researcher; "the good," "the bad," and "the ugly." Although Bob would not share with the teams how he assigned these descriptions, interview data revealed how each team perceived itself and other teams in relation to these labels. There was no explanation provided as to how these labels were initially formulated yet there was some indication that the labels were the result of Bob's perception of team interactions and communication styles and not based on team effectiveness. All teams had the perception that the seventh grade team was "the good." Both the sixth and eighth grade teams perceived themselves to be "the ugly." As one eighth grade teacher indicated, people heard these classifications and perceived the teams in this fashion. She added, "The seed was planted and we became it." The presumption is that these descriptions have influenced team behaviors.

Despite the fact that the principal did not use these specific labels, interview data revealed that he was certainly aware of them and had not put an end to their use. These perceptions of the teams have infiltrated the school community and may well have impacted how individual team members act and interact as well as how other people

interact with the teams, even the administration. In speaking with the researcher, members of the teams used this language to characterize themselves. As Crow and Pounder (2000) found, comparison of middle school teams creates competition and affects team performance.

What follows is an analysis of each team in relation to individual team member beliefs and the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school and how those beliefs are reflected in team meetings. Although all three teams share some similarities, each team is addressed separately because individual team member beliefs play out differently in relation to team functioning. Each team is also at a different stage of development and each team requires a different intervention to move forward.

Sixth Grade Team

The sixth grade team held their meetings in the language arts classroom. As team members entered the room, they appeared tired; they sat at a rectangular table quietly; the atmosphere in the room was cool yet polite; and their facial expressions and body language conveyed an attitude of not wanting to be there. There was no collegial banter. However, all team members had just finished teaching five consecutive classes which might explain their behavior. It could also be that they have nothing to say to one another as they wait for everyone to arrive. This behavior might also be an avoidance technique because of individual team member perceptions that they are argumentative and non-collegial, e.g., team meetings “can truly be feisty,” “they argue pretty vehemently,” and some “literally scream at each other.”

Team meetings began when everyone had arrived and discussion began when a team member made a comment or asked a question. Much of their planning time was

spent discussing students and meeting with parents, two areas that are very important to this team. Topics of discussion revolved around grouping students heterogeneously, helping with student family issues, or helping students where the focus was on the nurturing aspect of middle school. Academic content did not play a role at team meetings. Meetings were conducted in that manner until time ran out as there was no formal conclusion to any of the observed meetings. There was no written agenda although one team member did emphasize during her interview that an agenda would bring focus to the meetings. It was apparent that there was no real direction or focus to the meetings; whatever subject was most pressing took precedence. Although NMSA (2005) does not specifically recommend a team meeting agenda, the characteristic of “being disciplined in maintaining their focus” (p. 143) has been interpreted as such by others such as Katzenbach and Smith (1993) and Wald and Castleberry (2000).

Members of the sixth grade team are older teachers, three of whom are over fifty years in age. Their certifications are either elementary or secondary-level and all entered education as a second career. None of the team members had planned to enter the teaching profession. The current team members have been together for eleven years and three of those four team members have been together for sixteen years. Only one team member has had teaming experience in another school setting.

Although this team has had no middle school preparation and is an older group of traditionally trained teachers, team members are receptive to the middle school philosophy. They want heterogeneous grouping of students for instruction. They are proud of their integrated curriculum units and the student work associated with those

units. They demonstrated that despite their perception of not communicating well, they can work together collaboratively to improve student learning.

Interview data revealed that all team members enjoy working with middle school children. Two team members have attended NELMS conferences in the past and spoke of their commitment to the middle school concept.

Questionnaire data revealed that all team members believe that there is ample time available for professional development. However, only one team member agreed that there was sufficient time for professional development to support teaming; two were unsure; and one disagreed. Two team members agreed that professional reading is important to the teaming process.

With regard to a supportive environment: Three of the four team members believe that it is important to provide a supportive environment for students. During the interviews all team members expressed their beliefs that it is their responsibility to help students get through the difficult years of adolescence, to help students make good decisions, and to recognize that all students are different. Two team members mentioned that the school climate is not a positive one. Their beliefs were based on their perceptions of issues related to the previous administration, conflict among team members, and tension among teams resulting from labels assigned to each team by another faculty member.

Questionnaire data revealed that these same two team members disagreed with the statement that the school climate is positive while the others agreed with the statement.

NMSA (2005) recommends a “school culture that is inviting, supportive, and safe” (p. 35) for all stakeholders. Having such an environment is necessary for

maximizing student achievement and within this environment; students and teachers are encouraged to take risks, to explore, and to create (NMSA, 2005).

At team meetings, time was primarily spent discussing concerns about individual students and developing plans to assist and support these students. For example, students were referred to guidance support groups and team members volunteered to speak with individual students about incidents that otherwise would have been referred to the administration. All team members believe that a supportive environment is crucial for students and acted on their beliefs at team meetings. This is not surprising since most team members have elementary-level backgrounds which emphasize a student-centered focus. The belief that the school climate is not positive, as expressed by two team members, was not reflected at team meetings.

In terms of leadership: Interview data revealed that there is the perception that the team lacks leadership. Some team members expressed disappointment in the way that team planning time is used as illustrated by the comment "There's no one in control at meetings." Three team members referred to expectations placed on teams by the principal as well as directives issued by the principal as illustrated in comments such as "whatever the administration gives us" or "He wants us to read and share." This suggests that team members expect mandates or directives from the principal and view leadership as hierarchical. One team member did express her excitement that the current principal supports the middle school philosophy and has played a major role in moving the school toward the middle school concept.

Questionnaire data revealed that three team members agreed with the statement that opportunities are available for teachers to assume leadership. One team member

agreed with the statement that administrative support is ample while three team members are unsure.

NMSA (2005) states that “the traditional role of the principal as manager” (p. 21) is not effective in a successful middle school. Instead the principal must “cultivate leadership skills in others, empowering them to make decisions and enact changes” (p. 21). In other words, leadership must be collaborative.

Because the sixth grade team leader was on medical leave, the team began the school year with an interim team leader (Bob) who is on all three teams. He was appointed by the principal but he is only with the team for a short period of time each day. Bob’s appointment as interim team leader seemed to send a message from the administration that other team members were not considered for that interim position. At least it was interpreted that way. One comment that surfaced was, “”He’s not a team leader.” Pamela, team leader prior to a leave of absence, seemed especially offended, “I think a lot of it (interim team leader) is we just waste time. At the last team meeting he was coloring! I love to lead.” This suggests that Pamela would like to be team leader again.

Leadership was not displayed at team meetings by the interim team leader thus reflecting team member beliefs. The interim team leader reported information from team leader meetings but it appeared as if he believed that this was his only responsibility as interim team leader, that of a connection with the administration. He did not preside over team meetings, did not facilitate discussion, and often performed other tasks during the meetings. He viewed his role as team leader as a “link” to the administration rather than one of team leader.

At one team meeting, the principal explained *his expectations* of team members regarding two programs. The principal does not have middle school preparation and his actions may indicate that he too, does not view leadership as collaborative.

Although team member beliefs are not totally in line with the NMSA (2005) recommendations, team members exhibited collaborative leadership as they collectively resolved student issues at the team level and made other decisions regarding team activities. However, team members did not view their actions as a form of collaborative leadership.

With regard to interdisciplinary teaming: In response to a question about the definition of interdisciplinary teaming, responses revealed that team members hold differing views. Definitions included discussion of common concerns, having common students, and integrating curricula. Three of the four team members viewed individual attitudes and behaviors important to team effectiveness.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members agreed that there is sufficient time for the team to meet. All team members agreed that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement as well as create and implement interdisciplinary units. Three team members agreed that having common students is the purpose of teaming while one team member was unsure.

NMSA (2005) states that it is common to establish interdisciplinary teams composed of a teacher from each of the four core subjects who share a group of common students. These teams “facilitate learning and nurture relationships so the needs of students can be recognized and adjustments made in form and function to maximize learning” (p. 141).

Although team member beliefs were not reflected in team meetings, the team shared a common group of students. There was observed evidence of student work such as student storyboards and projects in classrooms which were reflective of the teams' interdisciplinary units. There was no evidence of improved student achievement. Interdisciplinary units may not have been discussed at team meetings because team members are confident with the number and quality of their existing interdisciplinary units.

In terms of communication: Each of the team members expressed his/her dissatisfaction with team communication skills as illustrated by comments such as "discussion is too heated for me," "they argue pretty vehemently," and "team meetings can truly be feisty." Individual team members do not believe that they communicate effectively.

In response to questionnaire statements, two team members indicated that they can express their thoughts at team meetings while two team members were unsure. Somewhat contradictory is that three team members agreed that they participate in decisions made by the team while one team member was unsure.

NMSA (2005) states that "effective teams have a culture of discourse at their center; communicating well within the team as well as with others outside of the team" (p. 143). NMSA (2005) further adds that good communication is vital for maintaining positive interactions within a school community.

Team meeting discourse data did reveal that all team members participated in discussions and team decisions but there was little evidence of conflict among team members. The researcher's presence may have affected team behaviors or it may well

have been that team members had begun to address their perceived conflict issues as illustrated by comments such as “we tolerate each other now,” or “we’re trying to be collegial.” If one examines the Wald and Castleberry (2000) study, communication is important to the teaming process as individual members present their points of view or defend them when challenged. This team chose the best of ideas presented at team meetings which relied on the ability of team members to talk with each other; they worked “together to understand and mold the group’s many ideas into a new whole” (Wald & Castleberry, 2000, p. 63).

Communication skills, although perceived as being poor, are not out of line with the literature on team discourse. Teams often struggle with communication as they work to develop team norms that address conflict (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Rottier, 1996; Juvonen, et al., 2004). This team demonstrated to some degree that they recognized a communication issue and were working toward resolution. According to Rottier (1996), the sixth grade team is at the “norming” stage of team development in which team members are learning to get along with one another, building a sense of trust, and learning how to make good decisions even though it may be difficult.

With regard to common planning time: Interview data revealed that all team members believe that there is no focus to team meetings.

Responses to the questionnaire revealed that the team does not have rules for working together and only two team members reported that there is sufficient time for the team to meet.

NMSA (2005) states that common planning time should be used to coordinate team activities, coordinate and integrate curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Meetings should be managed well, organized with an agenda to guide the meetings, and time should not be wasted on excessive conversation related to things that cannot be changed or items that have been repeatedly discussed. Team members should arrive on time and not perform other tasks during a team meeting. These are structures designed to develop normative behaviors for team functioning.

At team meetings, the sixth grade team did not always use common planning time in ways recommended by NMSA (2005) and the team did not have defined norms that guide how the team operated.

With the exception of coordinating team activities for the day before winter break, team discourse was often random and unrelated to the NMSA (2005) recommendations. For example, at one team meeting when one team member was expressing her concerns about the advisory program, discussion turned to student grades followed by other unrelated topics. What actually took place at team meetings reflected individual team member beliefs about the use of common planning time and lack of team focus.

Team member behaviors are in keeping with what the Crow and Pounder (2000) and Fauske and Schelble (2002) studies reported; teams often use common planning time organizing non-instructional school activities, discussing non-teaming issues, and discussing individual students. In light of the elementary-level preparation of three team members and the elementary-level experiences of all team members, it is not surprising that discourse at team meetings had a child-centered focus.

In terms of team goals: Interview data revealed that for all team members, heterogeneous grouping of students for instruction, making the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade comfortable for students, making connections with students, and

developing interdisciplinary curriculum were the perceived team goals. Recall that the principal-created sixth grade team goal of “assessment” was not reflective of individual team member goals. Individual goals were related to incorporating technology into the curriculum. From interview data, sixth grade team members were not committed to the team goal of “assessment.”

Questionnaire data revealed that three of the four team members agreed that improving student achievement was a goal of teaming while one team member was unsure.

NMSA (2005) recommends that teams have “specific measurable goals that they achieve” (p. 143) while Rosenholtz (1991), Katzenbach and Smith (1993), and others have stated that clearly written and commonly held goals are crucial to team performance.

With the exception of developing interdisciplinary curriculum and the transition from fifth to sixth grade, team member beliefs regarding their perceived team goals were reflected in team meetings. The team spent one entire team meeting creating heterogeneous class groupings for instruction from the homogeneous class groupings that had been assigned at the opening of school. Heterogeneous grouping of students is a strong component of middle school philosophy (NMSA, 2005) and supported by Tomlinson (2001) as a means to address the diverse ability and maturity levels among adolescents and to help students socially, academically, and emotionally. However, it was unclear if the team discussion about heterogeneous student groupings was linked to improving student achievement or whether it was a result of team members being more

comfortable with heterogeneous groupings because they experienced this configuration when teaching elementary school.

This team does not have clearly written or measurable goals that would promote rational planning and action or criteria to evaluate performance (Rosenholtz, 1991; Glickman, 1993). However, what is important about the perceived sixth grade team goals is that they are commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school and are supported by Macroff (1993) and Glickman (1993).

In terms of curriculum: During the interviews, all team members referred to a number of interdisciplinary units that had been developed and implemented. Team members further explained that history was the dominant discipline for these interdisciplinary units and that individual team members could elect to participate in a unit depending on his/her comfort level. It was also important to team members that there be a natural connection to his/her curriculum.

Questionnaire data revealed that all team members were involved in curriculum decisions. Two team members agreed that curriculum integration is important to the teaming process while two team members were unsure.

Development of interdisciplinary units is part of the larger NMSA (2005) recommendations related to curriculum and instruction to provide relevant, challenging, and interactive learning for the child.

The interdisciplinary units described by the sixth grade teachers were not reflected in team meeting discourse. However there was evidence, in the form of student work, of interdisciplinary units. Although by some definitions this is integrated curriculum, it does not fit exactly the NMSA (2005) definition that includes students'

interests and questions as a foundation for an integrated curriculum. The Bishop and Pflaum (2005a, 2005b) studies support the NMSA (2005) recommendation in reporting that student relevance in curriculum played a critical role in engaging students in their learning process which in turn, increased achievement. For this team, their curriculum represents a more cross-discipline thematic approach rather than a truly relevant and integrated curriculum. This is not surprising given that they have had no middle school preparation and little professional development related to the middle school concept.

With regard to flexible scheduling: The interview data revealed that all team members believe that students should be grouped heterogeneously for instruction as mentioned earlier. Two team members support the block schedule concept which allows for longer blocks of instructional time to implement their interdisciplinary units and meet the needs of the broad range of abilities within the heterogeneous classroom. One team member mentioned using flexible student groupings within his classroom.

Questionnaire data did not address flexible scheduling.

As part of the larger organizational structure, NMSA (2005) states that having large blocks of time for instruction with students enables teachers to “adjust and rearrange their instructional time as they see necessary in order to achieve the team’s instructional goals” (p. 149) as well as the use of flexible grouping of students within the classroom.

Team member beliefs were reflected at team meetings as heterogeneous student groups were created for instruction. One team member discussed how he grouped students in the classroom to benefit all students thus confirming his belief about flexible scheduling in the classroom. For example, he told of how he created groups in the

classroom so that each group would have one student leader in each group, one student who was organized, and so forth. For the two team members who expressed a belief in the importance of block scheduling, their beliefs were minimally reflected at team meetings. There was some discussion regarding the advisory program schedule interfering with the existing team block schedule and the impact that had on the team's instructional program. Team member beliefs are commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations for flexible scheduling.

In terms of assessment and evaluation: During the interviews, individual team members spoke of a variety of assessment and evaluation measures that were used with the integrated units. Portfolios were used, rubrics were created, and students could create video presentations, write small plays, or complete collaborative projects to demonstrate understanding.

Questionnaire data did not relate directly to assessment and evaluation. However, three team members agreed that the purpose of teaming is to improve student achievement while one team member was unsure. Team members were unsure if they had goals for student achievement.

NMSA (2005) recommends that students can demonstrate their strengths and understandings in a variety of ways.

During team meetings, team members did not talk about assessment tools or results of assessment. There was no evidence that team members looked at student work that NMSA (2005) stated "adds depth and dimension to discussions that may have once focused on misbehaving or challenged students but now focus on important curriculum and instructional issues. Looking at student work has proven to be a meaningful

exercise” (p. 146). At team meetings they continued to focus on their concerns related to student behaviors and the affective needs of their students.

As mentioned earlier, the sixth grade team implemented block scheduling two days a week and rearranged student schedules to allow for heterogeneous grouping of students. To create the heterogeneous groupings, the team did offer their individual perceptions of each student’s achievement level. However, assessments were based on individual team members’ perceptions of student ability and not on factual data.

In terms of an advisory program: The interview data revealed differing thoughts about the advisory program currently in place.

Old Towne Middle School has an advisory program in place which allows students to meet with their advisors for about ten minutes each morning for attendance and school announcements. In addition, one day a week students meet with their advisors for forty-five minutes during a designated instructional class period. This instructional period changes each week on a rotating basis so that the same class period is not eliminated each week.

One team member preferred the advisory program when it was shorter. One team member expressed her belief that the program was important for establishing relationships. Two team members expressed their concern that the advisory program was not effective and interfered with the sixth grade block scheduled instructional time. Team members also expressed concern that two advisory groups were assigned to one classroom which did not allow teachers the opportunity to get to know their students well. Interview data further revealed that getting to know and advocate for students was crucial but team members had not been able to make the advisory program a place to do

this. All team members indicated how much they enjoy working with middle school children.

Questionnaire data revealed that all team members agreed that knowing students well as individuals is important to teaming.

NMSA (2005) recommends an adult advocate for every student “who is knowledgeable about adolescent development, who enjoys working with young adolescents, and who comes to know students well as individuals” (p. 64). Instituting an advisory program “designed to meet the affective needs of young adolescents while supporting their academic development” (p. 65) has been a means to accomplish this and is supported by Camblin (2003) and Anfara (2003).

At team meetings there was discussion regarding the advisory program and how it interfered with the team’s block scheduled instructional time. This confirmed the beliefs of two team members. Rather than examine an alternative block schedule, the team voiced their concern at team meetings and to the administration. Team members did not take on a leadership role in shifting their “blocks” to solve the “advisory problems.” It was not clear if team members were more concerned about the block schedule issue or more concerned with one instructional period being eliminated weekly. What was clear was that the administration had indicated that this situation would not change for the current school year but was being examined to arrive at a solution for the next school year.

Team members believe that it is important to establish close relationships with their students and that an advisory program is important to achieve this which is consistent with the NMSA (2005) recommendations and supported by Knowles and

Brown (2000), Camblin (2003), and Cooney (2000). The current structure of the advisory program has not worked for this team yet they do have close relationships with their students and do know their students well. To accomplish this, team members have used team planning time to share student information and often had casual conversations with students that the researcher observed in the hallways. For this team there is an apparent tension between the advisory program and academics. However, there was no discussion at team meetings as to how to resolve this tension. NMSA (2005) does not recommend that an advisory program interfere with instructional time.

With regard to parental and community involvement: Interview data revealed that all team members believe that activities for parents are important for making connections between home and school. All team members believe that parent conferences/contacts are important but team members are overwhelmed by the number they conduct.

Questionnaire data responses indicated that all team members agreed with the statement that much of team time is spent conferencing with parents. Three team members agreed with the statement that much of team time is spent discussing students while one team member was unsure.

NMSA (2005) recommends a comprehensive program that “helps schools establish full and productive programs of school–family–community partnerships” (p. 78) to “strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development” (p. 84). NMSA (2005) also recommends parent education programs, volunteer programs, home-school learning experiences, and activities that include business, cultural, and civic groups as components of a successful middle school.

At team meetings, much of the planning time was spent discussing students which reflected three team member beliefs. Time spent conferencing with parents was also evident as team members confirmed dates of parent meetings. Parent conferences were also reported in the team notes which also confirms the beliefs of all team members that much of team planning time is spent conferencing with parents.

Even though parental involvement was not exactly what NMSA (2005) recommends, parental involvement was a crucial component of interdisciplinary teaming for this team. As evidenced by discussion at team meetings, teachers and parents communicated frequently via email, telephone, and parent conferences.

Although sixth grade team members did not specifically mention family and community partnerships, activities such as parent nights, activity nights, and curriculum nights for parents were uncovered in the interview data. The team provided informal gatherings for parents and children to meet with team members prior to the opening of school and that were also continued once school had begun. These events were not reflected in team meetings.

Providing opportunities for parents, other than parent/teacher conferences is a first step toward keeping parents informed and is recommended by NMSA (2005). Studies by Henderson and Mapp (2002), Juvonen, et al. (2004), and Camblin (2003) reported that students are more likely to be successful when their families are more formally involved in school.

The sixth grade team problem-solved around students, possibly at the expense of the curriculum focus. NMSA (2005) recommends that teams do not waste time on excessive discussion talking about matters that cannot be changed or have been discussed

repeatedly. At team meetings, the same problems kept “cropping up” and yet the team continued to address them. The reality of this sixth grade team is that they are committed to their students and will discuss matters until they resolve the issues to their satisfaction. Although this is not commensurate with NMSA (2005) guidelines, it does allow team members the opportunity to know their students well as individuals while supporting their academic development. This is a team that exhibits a child-centered focus.

For a shift in the way that this team operates, there needs to be a shift in the way that the administration works with the team. This team understands the nurturing aspect of middle school but has been given directives by the administration about the academic aspect of middle school. Fullan (1993), Crow and Pounder (2000), and others have found that policies should not be mandated by the administration, that alternatives should be suggested to create a climate of collaboration and shared decision making. As Fullan (1993) wrote, “You can’t mandate what matters. The more complex the change the less you can force it” (p. 21). Fullan (1993) further added, “If there is one cardinal rule of change in human condition, it is that you cannot *make* people change. You cannot force them to think differently or compel them to develop new skills” (p. 23).

The principal should inform this team that they are “doing some things right” with regard to the middle school concept. He should praise the team on their child-centered focus and capitalize on that to bring attention to the academic focus in their use of common planning time. The sixth grade team, despite perceptions that they are “the bad” or “the ugly,” demonstrated some beliefs that are commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. This is a team that supports heterogeneous grouping of students for instruction, integrated curriculum, active learning, adult advocacy, multiple teaching and

learning approaches, a variety of assessment and evaluation methods, and an unstated shared vision of what's best for children.

Although these beliefs are implemented in varying degrees, the beginning stages of some NMSA (2005) recommendations are present. This team has moved beyond the point of just being a group of people who work together. Although team members support and have implemented the middle school philosophy in varying degrees, most elements for a successful middle school were not reflected in team meetings. However, this team has made some important strides in moving toward being a strong component of a successful middle school.

Recommendations for this team would include on-going job embedded professional development and support related to creating team rules for more efficient use of team planning time, continued work on communication skills, examining curriculum in relation to student interests and questions, examining student work to inform instruction, and reflecting on their own practice. At the same time, team members should collaborate to develop team goals that are clearly written and measurable that can be assessed regularly to determine progress toward those goals.

Seventh Grade Team

This is a team that arrived at team meetings with energy. They sat at circular tables with Laura and Barbara at one table, Fran at another, and Mark at another table yet all were facing each other. Observation revealed that they sat this way so each would have space to work on other things such as grading papers or making up a quiz. According to NMSA (2005) this behavior violates "the norms of acceptable team

behavior by arriving late, grading papers, or missing the meeting altogether” (p. 145).

They greeted each other warmly and engaged in social conversation before the meeting.

Although there was no definitive start to a meeting (no written agenda), Laura or Barbara usually began with a comment or a question which signified the start of the meeting. Notes written in Laura’s calendar appeared to determine what the agenda was for each meeting. Fran and Mark said there was no written agenda for meetings while Barbara believed there was. For Barbara, who would sometimes jot notes in Laura’s calendar, this calendar was interpreted as a team agenda. Barbara also took team meeting notes on a form labeled “Agenda” which was blank at the start of the meeting. Team notes were vague and did not contain detailed information. For example, topics and student or teacher names were listed but the information discussed by the team was not noted. There did not appear to be any structure to team meetings. There would often be several conversations going on at the same time, people might be grading papers, one person might be whistling or singing, and others might be sorting and hole-punching papers. As one team member stated, “There’s a lot going on all at once but it’s because we have a lot to get done.”

The seventh grade team is a younger team, not only in age but also in the number of years the team has been together. This was Mark’s first year with the team while the others have been together for less than five years. Three team members are between the ages of twenty-three and thirty-five while Laura is over fifty years old. Laura saw this age difference as an asset to the team, “My age and experience offsets their youth and excitement. It’s a great experience.” All team members have elementary or secondary-

level certification. With the exception of Mark, all team members have had prior teaming experience in other school settings.

During the interviews, one team member mentioned that all team members are enrolled in a curriculum and assessment course offered by the principal through a local university. Two team members mentioned that they were looking forward to working with NELMS as the school implements middle school reform. Three team members mentioned that they “love” working with middle school children while one team member was emphatic that he does not want to teach middle school and intends to move to a high school teaching position within the next two years.

Questionnaire responses revealed that three team members agreed that there is ample support for professional development while only one team member agreed that there is ample professional development to support teaming. Only Mark, the first year teacher, agreed that professional reading is important to the teaming process.

NMSA (2005) recommends specialized middle school preparation as well as on-going professional development which includes professional reading, formal course work, and other learning opportunities.

At team meetings, there was minimal discussion related to NELMS which was primarily conjecture about what role NELMS would have with the team in the future. With the exception of Mark, team members seemed pleased that NELMS would be working with the team.

Although team members did not have middle school preparation, three team members had teaming experience in other school settings and expressed their enthusiasm in moving toward the middle school philosophy.

In terms of a supportive school environment: Interview data revealed that three team members indicated that teaming provides a supportive environment for them and that team members “support each other well.” One team member referred to the school climate as “not a friendly middle school environment.”

Questionnaire responses revealed that three team members agreed that the school environment was positive while one team member disagreed.

NMSA (2005) states that “Successful schools for young adolescents are universally, characterized by a culture that is inviting, supportive, and safe” (p. 35).

At team meetings, team members did not focus their attention on a supportive environment for children. Instead, observation revealed that within the team, they supported each other well.

Data from this team were confounding. Recall that teams had been labeled as “the good,” “the bad,” or “the ugly” by the reading specialist and the seventh grade team was perceived by the school community as “the good” team. For a team that is perceived by the school community as being “the good,” there was little evidence to suggest that they did anything of any substance that addressed the needs of children and their learning which is discussed later. Team meeting focus was directed more toward supporting team members as individuals as they shared stories from their personal lives, thus reflecting the beliefs of three team members.

In terms of leadership: Interview data revealed that seventh grade team members, except Mark, briefly mentioned leadership generally in vague terms of the team leader position. One team member sometimes will ask the team leader what will be discussed at the team meeting while one team member indicated that the team leader was “too nice,”

while the team leader viewed her role in terms of making sure that everyone was happy. Mark, the first year teacher, was the only team member who mentioned leadership in terms of the principal. He expected an administrative presence in the school and that presence was important; an attitude consistent with a traditional junior high school or high school philosophy. He also said, "He brings out the best in us" which indicates a level of administrative support to guide the team.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members agreed and one team member disagreed with the statement that leadership opportunities are available for faculty members. One team member was unsure. Three team members agreed and one team member disagreed with the statement that administrative support is ample.

NMSA (2005) recommends that principals and teachers work "collaboratively to enhance student learning" (p. 19).

At team meetings, observation revealed a team leader who facilitated team meetings to some degree yet also allowed people to do whatever they wanted. There was no evidence of written team rules that would provide structure to the meetings. There was also no written job description for the team leader position which was confirmed by the principal. Team members would come and go from meetings, grade student work, and perform other non-team related tasks. With no structure to the meetings, people lost focus and the team leader did not attempt to refocus team discussion and would often get caught up in the "off focus" discussion herself. Perhaps this explains why one team member believed the team leader was "too nice." The team leader's behavior at team meetings, in some sense, reflected two team member beliefs. Even though there was an

appointed team leader, it appeared as though two team members shared the role, perhaps because of their close friendship.

The team leader's behavior is not unusual if one examines the Rottier (1996) and McCammon (1992) studies that reported that it is important to have written expectations for the team leader; groups should have some knowledge of how they are expected to work.

With regard to interdisciplinary teaming: In response to a question regarding the definition of interdisciplinary teaming, interview data revealed that one team member believed that teaming meant having a common goal and sharing common students. Another team member indicated that teaming provided a structure to talk about ideas related to curriculum and students. Two team members mentioned that teaming was making connections among academic disciplines while three team members emphasized that teaming was a support system for team members.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members agreed with the statements that sufficient time is available to meet, that team members agree with the objectives they are trying to achieve with students, and that the team has specific goals for student achievement. Three team members agreed with the statement that the purpose of teaming is to improve student achievement while one team member is unsure.

NMSA (2005) states that "effective teams share a commitment to improving student, team, and school performance" (p. 142-143).

The team shares common students however, there was no evidence of having implemented interdisciplinary units or how connections were made among the disciplines. At observed team meetings, individual team members spent time performing

non-team related tasks but observation revealed that for most team members, they supported each as they shared school related and personal stories.

At one team meeting, the team made an attempt to plan team time each month to work on an interdisciplinary unit that would be developed with the assistance of NELMS. There was no discussion related to what this unit would include or how subject areas would be incorporated. At one point, one team member told the team that he did not understand how this unit connected to *his* curriculum and received no substantive response to his concern. Eventually the team lost focus during the discussion; the item was dropped from the agenda, and the concerned team member did not pursue the issue. This team member's behavior provided some insight about his degree of commitment to interdisciplinary teaming and perhaps confirmed his belief that he was left out of team decisions.

Team members, except one, made references to wanting to work on an interdisciplinary unit but "not enough time" was given as the primary reason why the team had not been able to develop a unit. The team had daily team planning time as well as daily personal planning time as recommended in the literature (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Perhaps the lack of structure and focus at team meetings was the major reason why the team had the perception of not having time to work on interdisciplinary units. The team blamed the structure of the school when, in fact, the team did not act as though they understood the elements required for efficient use of common planning time. Two team members' belief about team member support and one team member's belief about sharing common students were reflected in team meetings.

In terms of communication: Interview data revealed that three team members believe that team members communicate well. One team member believed that team discourse was chaotic and unproductive. One team member believes that communication is a key element to successful teaming.

Questionnaire data revealed that three team members agreed that they can express their thoughts at meetings while only two team members agreed that they participate in decisions made by the team.

NMSA (2005) states that effective teams “have a culture of discourse at their center and communicate effectively within the team and with those outside the team” (p. 143).

Although seventh grade team members hold differing beliefs about expressing their thoughts and participating in team decisions, they believe that they communicate well. Team meetings were chaotic with several conversations taking place simultaneously. However, even though team members displayed good rapport with one another as well as open communication, Mark and Fran often sat silently during team related discussions. Laura and Barbara were the major contributors to team decisions while Fran and Mark were primarily involved in the social banter of the group. Individual team member beliefs were reflected at team meetings to some degree.

Good rapport with one another is not necessarily a good indication of good communication skills if all team members do not share equally in team decisions. Team member behaviors at team meetings may be an indication that team members need professional development to assist them with their communication skills. As reported in

the Pounder (1998) study, members who dominate team discussion or team members who do not contribute may need help in confronting these problems.

In terms of common planning time: Interview data revealed that three team members believe that team meetings are chaotic. One team member interpreted the team meeting structure as confusing in that one team member multi-tasked while two team members carried on their own conversation. These behaviors made him feel uncomfortable and his comments may be his way of explaining that he felt left out and that he needed to learn the rules for being part of the team. Another team member explained that the same two team members don't always feel that it is important to include her in their conversations.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members agreed that there is sufficient time to meet. Only the team leader agreed that the team has rules for working together.

NMSA (2005) states that common planning time is essential in order to accomplish team tasks that improve student achievement. Team common planning time should not be used for non-team related issues or for discussion of things that have been repeatedly discussed and cannot be changed.

Observation of team meetings confirmed the beliefs of the three team members who believe that team meetings are chaotic. There was no evidence that the team had rules for working together. Observation revealed that this team told stories about student behaviors in the classroom. However, as each member talked about a particular student behavior, the team did not discuss what might be done to help that student. Unlike the sixth grade team, the seventh grade team did not often talk about student related issues until they were resolved. Observation also revealed that team members often shared

personal stories at team meetings which were initially interpreted by the researcher as interruptions to team focus. Although the stories did interrupt team focus, they did demonstrate the support that team members provide for one another.

If one examines the Crow and Pounder (2000) study that found team members often use common planning time to discuss non-teaming issues, the seventh grade team behaviors are not unusual.

In terms of team goals: Interview data revealed that three team members believe that the team goal was to create an integrated unit. One team member stated that the team did not have written team goals.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members agreed with the statements that the team has objectives they are trying to achieve with students and that the purpose of teaming is to improve student achievement. All team members are unsure that the team has specific goals for student achievement. All team members agreed that implementing interdisciplinary units was important to teaming.

NMSA (2005) recommends that effective teams have a “clearly defined purpose that guides their work and specific measurable goals that they achieve” (p. 143).

The teams’ perceived goal of creating an integrated unit was discussed at team meetings but at a superficial level. There was no discussion related to what the unit would include or what connections would be made among the academic disciplines. There was only mention made that the unit would be an orienteering unit. What is interesting is that the perceived seventh grade team goal of creating an integrated unit was commensurate with the principal-created team goal of “integrated instruction.” The principal-created team goal was intended to reflect individual team member goals.

However, as was the case with the sixth grade team, individual team member goals were not related to “integrated instruction.” In fact, individual team member goals were related to assessment, the traditional curriculum, and classroom culture.

The vagueness of discussion regarding the integrated unit is not surprising if one considers that “integrated instruction” is vague and meaningless outside of a context for which it is intended. Rosenholtz (1991) reported that clearly written goals are essential for rational planning and action which is clearly not the case for the seventh grade team. As Schmoker (1999) reported, schools typically lack clear goals.

In terms of curriculum: Interview data revealed that the team appears to be in the beginning stage of integrating curriculum. Two team members stated that the team has begun work on an integrated unit yet one team member stated that the team has not done any work on the integrated unit. One team member believes that curriculum should connect to student interests as well as make connections to other disciplines.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members agreed with the statements that curriculum integration is important to teaming and that teachers are involved in curriculum decisions. Only one team member agreed that doing interdisciplinary units was the purpose of teaming while the other team members were unsure.

NMSA (2005) states that curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory is a programmatic feature of a successful middle school.

Team meeting discourse data revealed that curriculum was discussed in a general way and at a very superficial level. In a sense, team member beliefs were reflected at team meetings. Although three team members indicated that creating an integrated unit was a team goal, the team has not clearly defined the parameters of that unit. It was not

clear if all team members fully understood the purpose of the unit in terms of the NMSA (2005) recommendations as was indicated by the comment, “It’s important that we’re all saying we’re integrating.” No time frame was set to plan the unit.

It was evident at team meetings that curriculum was viewed as separate-subject disciplines as illustrated by comments such as “In math class...” and “I don’t see how *my* curriculum fits.”

With regard to flexible scheduling: Interview data revealed that one team member believes that the existing school schedule is a “barrier” to flexible scheduling. One team member believes that the team has the flexibility to change individual student class schedules in order to mitigate student conflict.

Questionnaire data were not related to flexible scheduling.

NMSA (2005) states that with large blocks of time, “teachers are able to adjust and rearrange instructional time as they see necessary in order to achieve the team’s instructional goals” (p. 149). NMSA (2005) also recommends flexibility in small student groupings within the classroom.

Although the seventh grade team did not operate under block instructional time, team member beliefs regarding flexible scheduling were somewhat reflected at one team meeting. One team member attempted to create a schedule that would change the order of the class periods on a regular basis. Not everyone agreed and no decision was made to change the schedule. Although the seventh grade team adjusted the team schedule to accommodate specific events or rearranged student schedules for the benefit of the student, the team worked under a fixed length period class schedule.

The team perceived the school schedule to be a “barrier” to flexible scheduling when, in fact the team could have created a modified block schedule arrangement for instruction. Students were also grouped homogeneously, contradictory to NMSA (2005) recommendations, based on teachers’ perceptions that the child’s ability was below, on, or above grade level. These practices are certainly not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school.

In terms of assessment and evaluation: There were no references made in the interview data.

Questionnaire data revealed that three team members agreed that the purpose of teams is to improve student achievement while one team member was unsure.

NMSA (2005) advocates for “continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures to provide evidence of every child’s learning progress” (p. 27).

At team meetings, the team did discuss assessment and evaluation indirectly and at a superficial level. Student reading levels were discussed briefly and one team member mentioned the negative results of a recent test. There was some discussion related to traditional forms of assessment and evaluation that were being used by other team members. Alternative forms of assessment such as portfolios or the use of rubrics for evaluation were not discussed nor was there any indication that alternative forms of assessment were in place. This is not surprising since team members have not had middle school preparation or professional development related to teaming. The Pate (2004) study reported that teachers who use a traditional curriculum format in a traditional fixed length period format do not see a need to change their traditional forms of assessment and evaluation. Thus it is not unexpected that this team views assessment

and evaluation as they do. However, it does seem odd that this team uses traditional forms of assessment and evaluation in light of the fact that three team members have had prior teaming experience in other school settings.

In terms of an adult advocate: Interview data revealed that one team member believes that the advisory program is a waste of time. Three team members believe that the advisory program is valuable but expressed their dissatisfaction with having to lose one instructional period each week to accommodate the advisory program schedule. One team member did mention that if the school was to be a “spotlight” school, an advisory program was necessary.

Questionnaire data showed that two team members agreed with the statement that the purpose of teaming is to make a small school within a large school, i.e., to know students better.

NMSA (2005) states that successful middle schools are characterized by an adult advocate for every student who knows students well as individuals. This responsibility is often addressed by instituting an advisory program designed to meet the affective needs of the child while supporting academic development.

One team member’s belief about the advisory program was reflected in a team meeting when he actually said, “I move to remove advisory!” Other team member beliefs were not reflected in team meetings. However, other team members did give general descriptions of what they might do during the advisory period such as “talking about bullying” and “discussing the school principles.”

Since the teachers at Old Towne Middle School have not received professional development related to the goals and implementation of an advisory program, it is not

unusual that team members were vague in their discussion about the advisory program. As Knowles and Brown (2000) reported, “advisors must be willing to develop a relationship with students different from the one they experience as a regular classroom teacher – one characterized by caring and not authoritarianism” (p. 153). Lack of training may explain why these teachers seem to view an advisory program as a “curriculum to be covered rather than a relationship to be nurtured” (NMSA, 2005, p. 68).

With regard to parental and community involvement: Interview data revealed that one team member mentioned that team time is sometimes used for parent conferences. Another team member referred to parents but in terms of poor behavior of the parents during teacher/parent conferences.

Questionnaire data revealed that three team members disagreed with the statement that parental support exists for teachers while one team member is unsure. Two team members agreed with the statement that much of team time is spent discussing students while two team members were unsure. One team member agreed, one was unsure, and two disagreed with the statement that much of team time is spent conferencing with parents.

NMSA (2005) recommends a comprehensive program of partnerships that “helps schools establish full and productive programs of school–family–community partnerships” (p. 78) to “strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development” (p. 84).

Team members did not focus on family or community partnerships at team meetings. There was brief mention of some parent conferences and school-initiated telephone calls and emails to parents. There was a subtle indication of family

partnerships as the team discussed a few family situations and how the team and the family might work together for the benefit of the student.

Data from this team were confounding. What was evident was that team members, perhaps with the exception of Mark, do believe that they are a successful middle school team. Three of the team members had prior teaming experience in other school settings which in their minds has given them the “edge” in understanding how middle school teams should function. “We are a high functioning team, given the conditions under which we work,” “We do things that other teams don’t because of our flexibility,” and “I do know something about teams. I’ve physically been on one” are some examples of how team members perceive themselves in relation to the other teams. What appears to have happened is that their perception of being a high functioning team has given them cause not to change. They believe that their team performance is a reflection of good middle school practice and therefore, perhaps there is no reason for them to change. In fact, they view themselves as being the “good” team at Old Towne Middle School.

However, according to Rottier (1996), the seventh grade team could be categorized as being in the “forming” stage of team development. The “forming” stage of development, as defined by Rottier, is a time of excitement and enthusiasm as team members begin to bond. Team member enthusiasm can lead to setting unrealistic goals which can result in frustration and anxiety about what is expected of the team. Although Rottier’s definition of the “forming” stage of team development does not fit exactly the seventh grade team behaviors, the team is in the beginning stages of team development in which team members discuss students, conduct parent conferences, and coordinate team

activities. There is a need for the principal to inform this team that they are not the “high functioning” team they perceive themselves to be and provide professional development to assist them.

Recommendations for this team would include on-going job embedded professional development and support to create team rules for managing team time more effectively, to learn about heterogeneous grouping of students for instruction, to learn how to integrate curriculum, to examine curriculum in relation to student interests and questions, to examine student work to inform instruction, to learn about alternative forms of assessment and evaluation, and to reflect on their own practice. This team should also collaborate to develop team goals that are clearly written and measurable which can be assessed regularly to determine progress toward those goals.

Eighth Grade Team

The eighth grade team operated very differently from the sixth and seventh grade teams. Team members entered the room where they sat at student desks with the exception of Oscar. The team met in Oscar’s classroom so Oscar always sat at his own desk. Maura and Wilma would most often sit at student desks on opposite sides of the classroom. Wilma and Oscar would chat with each other while Maura did not say much. The team leader, who was often the last one to arrive, sat at the back of the room and sometimes began the meeting by telling the team what they were going to do. For example, she said, “Okay, I thought maybe today would be a day where we could catch up.” At other times she would ask, “What’s on the agenda today?”

The eighth grade team was similar to the sixth grade team in terms of age. Three members are between forty-one and fifty years old while the team leader is over fifty.

All members have elementary or secondary-level certification. The team has been together for over five years with three of the team members having been together for sixteen years. The team leader came to Olde Town Middle School thirty-two years ago as a first year teacher. None of the eighth grade teachers had middle school preparation, little or no professional development related to teaching middle school, and no previous teaming experience.

Three team members believe there is ample professional development available for them but one team member is unsure. Only two team members believe that there is ample professional development to support teaming. Two team members do not believe that professional reading is important to the teaming process while two team members are unsure. Recall that NMSA (2005) recommends middle school preparation programs for teachers and on-going professional development that supports the team and would include professional reading.

On a day when NELMS had been scheduled to work with the team, there was a schedule conflict with a planned team activity and team members decided not to change the date of their team activity. Although the team had an opportunity for professional development, they elected not to take advantage of it. This is an example of a situation where team action is not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) professional development recommendations that support teaming. Juvonen, et al., (2004) go as far as to say that those who do not have specific middle school preparation do not understand the needs of young adolescents and are unfamiliar with effective approaches that promote social, emotional, and intellectual growth.

In terms of a supportive school environment: During the interviews, team members did not discuss a supportive school environment for students. Three team members did not discuss a supportive team environment for team members. However, one team member expressed his belief that teaming required mutual support and consensus and further explained that this was not the case at team meetings.

Questionnaire data revealed that three team members agreed that the school climate is positive while one team member disagreed.

Note that NMSA (2005) deems a supportive school environment crucial to high functioning middle school teams.

At team meetings student support was not discussed. Instead, team members spent time emphasizing the need for students to take on more individual responsibility. Team members did not feel that it was their responsibility to “baby” students as indicated by statements such as, “He has to come to me and ask for help” and “I’m not chasing anyone for their work.” This illustrates that team beliefs are more in line with a junior high school philosophy rather than the middle school philosophy that emphasizes a supportive school environment for students in which the team is expected to take on a supportive role (NMSA, 2005). Team member beliefs are not in agreement with what NMSA (2005) states about a supportive environment. The beliefs of the individuals on this team are not surprising if one looks at the Brighton and Hertberg (2004) study that reported most middle school teachers’ belief systems are consistent with traditional viewpoints about the nature of teaching and learning. It could be that those with secondary backgrounds have not had any middle school training and have not taken full

advantage of professional development offered to them so they continue to act in the secondary-level mode.'

In terms of leadership: Interview data revealed that one team member believes that the team leader is the communication "link" between the team and the administration. However, two team members believe that the team leader often interrupts others at team meetings and conducts meetings according to her personal agenda. They also believe that the team leader is a "barrier" between the team and the administration. Both of these views about the team leader position indicate that team members still think in terms of the hierarchical model of leadership which is inconsistent with collaborative leadership as recommended by the NMSA (2005).

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members believe that administrative support is ample while two team members disagree with this.

NMSA (2005) states that "High-performing middle schools have high-performing learning-centered leaders—principals and teachers—working collaboratively to enhance student learning" (p. 19).

At team meetings, the team leader often interrupted others and directed discussion toward her concerns, confirming the beliefs of two team members as cited above and is at odds with the NMSA (2005) leadership recommendation which highlights inclusion of various viewpoints.

At one team meeting the same two team members who felt that the team leader was a "barrier" actually said, "Team leader is really another name for department head" and "It's (team leader meeting) putting another layer between us (team) and administration. There is no connection (of administration) to the teams."

At another meeting, these same two team members expressed their frustration that the administration did not support the team with regard to student behavioral issues. In response, the team leader reported that the team was responsible for addressing these student behaviors. There was no response from the two team members as they seemed to accept the team leader's explanation which is why, perhaps, these two team members perceive the team leader as a "barrier" between the team and the administration.

The team leader did report information discussed at team leader meetings to the team, confirming the belief of one team member that the team leader was a "link" to the administration. According to the literature, these team member behaviors are problematic for successful teaming. While Jackson and Davis (2000) stated that high achieving middle schools have strong, competent leaders who can set direction, develop people, and redesign the organization, Schmoker (1999) emphasized that teacher leadership at the school level was equally important.

With regard to interdisciplinary teaming: In response to a question regarding the definition of interdisciplinary teaming, responses revealed that all team members believe that developing thematic interdisciplinary units is a major part of teaming. One team member believes that it is important to share information about students as well as individual curriculum information. Another team member believes that trust and support among team members is important. Two team members expressed their concern that this team is not a team.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members believe there is sufficient time provided for the team to meet while two members are unsure.

NMSA (2005) states that effective middle schools “personalize learning” (p. 142) which is accomplished through a team organizational structure that “alters and personalizes the working relationships between students and teachers, therefore enhancing the context wherein good instruction can thrive” (p. 142).

At team meetings there was no discussion related to interdisciplinary units. Team members discussed not having enough time to create interdisciplinary units which the literature indicates is crucial for high-level team functions (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2003; Warren & Muth, 1995; NMSA, 2005). Teachers did not share curriculum information related to what was taking place in their individual classrooms.

The two team members who believe that “this team is not a team” actually spoke out in team meetings and said, “Team leaders are having discussions with administration. We (the team) should be having these discussions” and “We (the team) don’t make the decisions”; an indication that the team leader and the administration have more power which is not the collaborative nature of teaming that NMSA (2005) recommends. This confirms the beliefs of these two team members and is at odds with what NMSA (2005) says about teaming. If these people feel that they have no power or equal power, the literature says that schools become “nothing more than collections of independent teachers, each marching to the step of a different pedagogical drum” (Rozenholtz, 1992, p. 26).

All team members are in agreement with parts of the NMSA (2005) definition of teaming but not all of these parts of the definition were actually reflected in team actions.

If team members, especially the team leader, were more aware of team responsibilities, team authority, and collaborative leadership, team members might be

more apt to solve problems at the team level rather than think that they were constrained by the team leader and the administration. The two team members who believe that there is no collaborative leadership talk about it, yet they do not act on it. They do not challenge the status quo by acting on it.

In terms of communication: In looking at the interview data, there was a mix of beliefs about communication at team meetings. For one team member, team meetings were informal and concerns were expressed. Another team member believed that communication was the biggest challenge to teaming.

Questionnaire data revealed that three team members believe that they can express their thoughts at team meetings, two members believe that the team leader interrupts much of the time, and three team members believe that they are part of the decision making process.

NMSA (2005) states that “effective teams must have a culture of discourse at their center” (p. 143). At least two people do not think that this is happening. In terms of communication, the same two team members agree while the other two team members disagree.

At team meetings the team leader often interrupted and overruled others in the decision making process. This illustrated her control of what happened during meetings and created the perception that teaming was not an equal partnership. Meetings were conducted by the team leader who often “told” others what would be done rather than soliciting ideas from team members thus reflecting the beliefs of two team members. This communication pattern is not conducive to good teaming in the sense that NMSA (2005) recommends. The team’s work is to choose the best ideas presented which relies

on the ability of team members to talk “with” each other, “working together to understand and mold the group’s many ideas into a new whole” (Wald & Castleberry, 2000, p. 63). As Fullan (1991) wrote, “Collegiality among teachers as measured by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, etc. was a strong indicator of implementation success” (p. 132). This was not the case for the eighth grade team.

In terms of common planning time: Interview data revealed teachers’ perceptions that the majority of team meeting time is spent discussing students and meeting with parents. One team member indicated that most of the time there was no closure to the topic of discussion.

Questionnaire responses confirmed the interview data. All team members indicated that team time is primarily spent discussing students and conferencing with parents. For two team members, sufficient time is available for the team to meet and the team does not have rules for working together. Two team members were unsure about these two aspects.

According to NMSA (2005), daily common planning time is essential so that teams can plan ways to integrate curriculum, analyze test data, review student work, discuss current research, and reflect on instructional approaches. Team must define and commit to norms that guide how the team operates and must be disciplined in maintaining their focus (NMSA, 2005). This was certainly not the case for the eighth grade team.

At team meetings, team members did spend most of team time discussing students and meeting with parents confirming teacher beliefs, actions that are not commensurate with NMSA (2005) recommendations for the use of common planning time. According

to Anfara and Lipka (2003), common planning time must be used well by teams and all teachers must be held accountable for results. Just having the team structure does not ensure that a team performs well.

This team's use of common planning time is in keeping with the Crow and Pounder (2000) and Fauske and Schelble (2002) studies that found using common planning time to discuss students was a common team behavior. Although using common planning time primarily to discuss students and conference with parents may be a common team behavior, it is contradictory to good team functioning and problematic if this team is to move forward.

With regard to team goals: During the interviews, three team members indicated that the team had no goals while one team member referred to an interdisciplinary unit that she believed was a team goal.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members believed creating interdisciplinary units was important to teaming. However, there was no written evidence of team created goals. Recall that the principal had written team goals from individual personal goals. For the eighth grade team, the principal-created team goal was assessment/integration yet the meaning of this was not clear to the researcher.

NMSA (2005) states that effective teams have a "clearly defined purpose that guides their work and specific measurable goals that they achieve" (p. 143).

Team goals were not discussed at team meetings nor were interdisciplinary units. Even though one team member believed that developing an interdisciplinary unit was a team goal, she did not act on her belief at team meetings.

Perhaps if this team had a better understanding of the purpose of teaming and the mechanics of conducting an effective team meeting, the team would have clearly written team goals that were developed collaboratively, and team meetings might have been conducted more efficiently and effectively. As Schmoker (1999) reported "The lack of clear goals may provide the most credible explanation for why we are still inching along in our effort to improve schooling for U.S. children" (p. 23). Clearly written goals are necessary for rational team planning and action and provide criteria by which team performance can be evaluated (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1991).

In terms of curriculum: Two team members referred to planning an integrated unit in which the eighth grade Washington, DC, trip would be the culminating activity. One team member expressed her vision of an integrated unit based on a science power plant activity yet had not been able to get the other team members to become involved. However, this team member also mentioned that her primary curriculum focus was to prepare students for the high school.

Questionnaire data revealed that only one team member believes that curriculum integration is important to the teaming process. The other team members were unsure. However, two team members believe that doing interdisciplinary units is the purpose of teaming while one team member disagreed and one team member was unsure. These beliefs may indicate that even though one team member knows that interdisciplinary units is an expectation of teaming, other team members have not fully committed themselves to the concept.

NMSA (2005) wrote that curriculum must be "relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory" (p. 107) and recommends that teams spend "two or more days a week in

common planning time engaged in curriculum discussion, planning, and professional development” (p. 146).

Team meeting discussion was primarily focused on students and on the number of parent meetings scheduled for the team which were taking away from team meeting time as well as instructional time. The purpose of the state testing was questioned and comments made by team members indicated that they view curriculum in terms of separate-subject disciplines and not in terms of interdisciplinary curricular planning and implementation as recommended by NMSA (2005). Recall that the principal had been instrumental in providing daily common planning time for the teams and had issued a directive that use of this time was for curriculum development.

The eighth grade team, not having middle school preparation or middle school training, illustrates a team that is experiencing difficulty in breaking away from the traditional subject-centered curriculum focus to the more discipline-integrated, student-centered curriculum focus. Lack of middle school preparation may partially explain why team members have not moved toward examination of implementing an integrated curriculum. Having come from secondary-level preparation programs and having belief systems that are consistent with a traditional junior high school philosophy, this team has kept the subject-centered curriculum focus. Other factors include the emphasis on mandated standards enforced by high-stakes testing and the team’s belief that they have a major responsibility in their view to prepare students for high school. These traditional viewpoints of teaching and learning are inconsistent with the philosophy of addressing academic diversity within the middle school environment (Brighton & Hertberg, 2004) and are problematic for a school implementing middle school reform. This team is

perpetuating the traditional junior high school model in a context that is now being bolstered by teaming.

In terms of assessment and evaluation: During the interviews, two of the team members reported that they are struggling with the newly implemented grading system.

Questionnaire data revealed that three team members believe that the purpose of teaming is to improve student achievement and that the team has specific goals for student achievement. Two team members believe that the team has specific objectives they are trying to achieve with students. All team members disagreed with the statement that academic achievement has decreased with teaming.

NMSA (2005) urges educators to “conduct continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures in order to provide evidence of every student’s learning progress” (p. 127). NMSA (2005) further states that schools should avoid evaluating students on the basis of a test which is often the case in schools today.

At team meetings, discussion focused on a lack of student motivation in improving their grades as well as the number of student grades that were in need of improvement. Recall that the new grading system allows teachers to assign incomplete grades with the understanding that students will improve their grades with the help and support of their teachers.

Time at one meeting was spent reviewing student CAT scores in an attempt to determine a level of individual student achievement and to justify student placements in homogeneous class groupings. Team members expressed their concern that student scores were low. The general perception of team members was that if they could

determine some level of student achievement then they could create a plan to improve student achievement. With the emphasis that NCLB has placed on accountability in schools, it is not surprising that this team examined standardized test scores.

There was no discussion related to using multiple assessment and evaluation measures to understand what a child knows and is able to do, yet team members did discuss their frustration with the poor quality of student work on recent traditional tests and quizzes. Although the team did not use assessment and evaluation practices commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations, team member beliefs were reflected in team meetings.

Pate (2004) reported that appropriate and developmentally responsive assessment is an integral part of middle school education and that “a variety of assessment practices will help ensure that teachers capture student learning, for no single method can possibly encapsulate all that students have learned” (p. 73). The team’s focus on tests as a major source of evaluation and their emphasis on homogeneous groupings are clearly at odds with the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

With regard to an advisory program: Interview data revealed that three of the four team members believe that the newly structured advisory program was not well articulated, that the requested training was not provided, and that overall, the program is ineffective. Two team members were frustrated that a curriculum was not provided and that the advisory groups are too large which does not allow them to get to know their students well. One team member did not see a need for the advisory program because the school is small. These concerns are reported by Ayres (1994) who found that teachers

are uncommitted to advisory programs because of inadequate preparation, fear, and lack of experience.

Questionnaire data revealed that two team members believe that the purpose of teaming is to create a small school within a large school, i.e., to know students better. This belief would be embodied by a well-constructed advisory program.

NMSA (2005) supports an advisory program “designed to address the affective needs of young adolescents while supporting their academic growth” (p. 65). NMSA (2005) further adds that successful schools demonstrate a “continuity of caring and support that extends throughout a student’s middle level experience. An advisory program enables such a continuity of caring to take root” (p. 66).

At team meetings, discussion about the advisory program focused on the loss of instructional time rather than the purpose and goals of the program. Team members expressed their concern and frustration that the loss of instructional time had caused them to be behind in their individual curriculum. Recall that the advisory program eliminates one instructional class period each week. Because of this, team members are concerned that their students will not be prepared for the high school and that they may not do well on the mandated state testing. In other words, concerns regarding students’ subject-matter mastery took precedence over meeting the affective needs of the students contrary to the NMSA (2005) recommendation which gives equal weight to the affective and academic needs of the young adolescent.

Knowles and Brown (2000) reported that advisors develop “a relationship with students that is different from the one they experience as a regular classroom teacher—

one characterized by caring, not authoritarianism” (p. 153). Eighth grade team members were not well informed about the purpose and goals of an advisory program and viewed the program as a curriculum to be covered and not “a relationship to be nurtured” (NMSA, 2005, p. 68). This is not surprising since the advisory program had not been well articulated and the teams’ request for training had not been honored. Team members felt inadequately prepared to implement the advisory program as Ayres (1994) reported is often the case for poorly implemented advisory programs.

In terms of parental and community involvement: Three team members expressed their concern during the interviews with the overwhelming number of parent conferences that are held not only during team planning time but also during instructional time. Only one team member mentioned a student/community activity that was related to career awareness.

Questionnaire data revealed that all team members believe that they are supported by parents but spend most of team planning time discussing students and meeting with parents.

NMSA (2003) states that “Research studies clearly link the involvement of both family and other adults in the community with high levels of student achievement, improved student behavior, and greater overall support for schools” (p. 18). NMSA (2005) further stresses the importance of school-initiated family and community partnerships and if “middle level schools implement comprehensive and inclusive programs of partnership, then many more families respond, including those who would not become involved on their own” (p. 78).

Team meetings confirmed team member beliefs related to discussing students and meeting with parents. Discussion related to parental support was minimal. It was evident that discussions were related to negative student behaviors and that parent conferences were scheduled to address these negative student behaviors which is more reflective of a traditional junior high school philosophy. This team's view of parental involvement is consistent with a traditional junior high school philosophy where parents are only involved in the child's education when there is a specific issue to be addressed such as inappropriate student behavior or poor academic progress. Team member beliefs are clearly at odds with the NMSA (2005) recommendations for school-initiated family and community involvement yet are not unexpected if one recalls that these team members have not had specific middle school preparation or professional development related to the middle school concept.

The eighth grade team member beliefs and behaviors are reflective of a traditional junior high school philosophy. Team meetings were conducted as though they were academic department meetings. Team members viewed curriculum as subject-centered, students were grouped homogeneously, instruction was more didactic, and student assessments were primarily test oriented. This team could very well be a group of people who were assigned the same students in a traditional junior high school.

The results of this study uncovered an eighth grade team that is operating on a belief system that reflects their secondary-level preparation. A major recommendation for this team would be first to educate team members about the middle school concept and what is required to implement the NMSA (2005) elements deemed essential to create a successful school for young adolescents. This would require on-going, job embedded

professional development that would inform team members about young adolescent development, middle school philosophy and organization, and middle school curriculum that meets both the affective and academic needs of the middle level child. Additional professional development would include a focus on the collaborative nature of the middle level environment.

Summary

The following is an overall summary of teacher beliefs within the NMSA (2005) categories and whether or not they were reflected in team meetings. In cases where comments about a category were not made and thus were not reflected in team meetings, it may be an indication that those categories are not part of the individual's belief system and therefore not acted upon. Teachers need to have an awareness of the NMSA (2005) recommendations to create a successful middle school.

Teacher Beliefs within NMSA Category: Reflected or Not Reflected in Team Meetings

Leadership:

- 6th Grade Team – lack of at team meetings – Reflected
principal - Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – team leader – Reflected
principal – Not Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – team leader as barrier – Reflected

Almost all of the teachers expressed beliefs about leadership at team meetings.

Those beliefs were reflected accurately yet were not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

Supportive Environment:

- 6th Grade Team – support children – Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – support team members – Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – not mentioned – Not Reflected

The sixth and seventh grade teachers expressed their beliefs about a supportive environment and their beliefs were reflected in team meetings. However, they were not

totally in accordance with the NMSA (2005) guidelines. Eighth grade teachers did not mention a supportive environment.

Teaming:

- 6th Grade Team – interdisciplinary units – Not Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – support each other – Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – integrated unit – Not Reflected
- support of team – Not Reflected

The sixth and eighth grade teachers expressed their belief that interdisciplinary units were important to teaming which is commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. Those beliefs were not reflected in team meetings. The seventh grade teachers expressed their belief that teaming was a support system for them which was reflected in team meetings. However, this is only one aspect of middle school teaming.

Communication:

- 6th Grade Team – poor, working on it – Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – good, important – Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – team leader controls – Reflected

All teachers expressed their beliefs about communication which were accurately reflected in team meetings. Sixth and seventh grade teacher beliefs were commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations while the eighth grade teacher beliefs were not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

Common Planning Time:

- 6th Grade Team – no focus or control – Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – chaotic – Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – no closure, team leader controls – Reflected

All teachers expressed their beliefs about the use of common planning time and those beliefs were accurately reflected in team meetings. However, teacher beliefs were not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

Team Goals:

- 6th Grade Team – integrated curriculum – Not Reflected
heterogeneous grouping, student needs – Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – integrated unit – Reflected (minimal)
- 8th Grade Team – no goals, integrated unit – Not Reflected

Almost all of the teachers expressed their belief that an integrated curriculum was a team goal. Sixth grade teachers added heterogeneous grouping of students for instruction and meeting student needs which are commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations and were reflected in team meetings. Seventh grade teachers briefly mentioned an integrated unit at a team meeting while the eighth grade teacher beliefs were not reflected in team meetings.

Curriculum:

- 6th Grade Team – integrated curriculum – Not Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – integrated unit – Reflected (minimal)
- 8th Grade Team – integrated unit – Not Reflected
Prepare for high school – Reflected

All teachers expressed their beliefs that curriculum should be integrated. Sixth and eighth grade teacher beliefs were not reflected in team meetings even though the sixth grade team had several integrated units in place. Eighth grade teachers also expressed their belief that it was their responsibility to cover a prescribed curriculum to prepare students for the high school. High school preparation was reflected in team meetings. Seventh grade teachers only briefly mentioned integrated curriculum at one team meeting.

Flexible Scheduling:

- 6th Grade Team – block scheduling, heterogeneous grouping – Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – adjust individual student schedules – Not Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – no comments – Not Reflected

Sixth grade teachers expressed their beliefs about heterogeneous grouping of students and block scheduling for instruction. These beliefs were reflected accurately in

team meetings and are commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. Seventh grade team members expressed their beliefs that flexible scheduling was used to adjust individual student class schedules. Their beliefs are not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. Eighth grade team members did not express beliefs about flexible scheduling nor was flexible scheduling discussed in team meetings. The eighth grade focus was a traditional fixed-length class period schedule which is not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

Assessment and Evaluation:

- 6th Grade Team – alternative forms – Not Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – not mentioned – Not Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – grading system – Reflected

Individual teacher beliefs varied. Sixth grade teachers expressed their beliefs about their existing alternative forms of assessment and evaluation that are commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. However, these beliefs were not reflected in team meetings. Seventh grade teachers did not mention assessment and evaluation in the interviews or team meetings. Eighth grade teachers expressed their beliefs regarding a newly implemented school-wide grading system which is not totally commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. Their beliefs were reflected in team meetings.

Advisory:

- 6th Grade Team – valuable – Reflected (minimal)
- 7th Grade Team – valuable – Not Reflected
- waste of time – Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – ineffective – Reflected

All teachers expressed their beliefs about the advisory program. Most sixth and seventh grade teachers believe that the program is valuable which is commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. However, these beliefs were reflected differently in

team meetings. Eighth grade teachers expressed their belief that the advisory program was ineffective which was reflected in team meetings.

Parents and Community:

- 6th Grade Team – activities – Not Reflected
parent contact – Reflected
- 7th Grade Team – parent contact – Reflected
- 8th Grade Team – parent contact – Reflected

All teachers expressed their beliefs about parents and the community which were not commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. All teacher beliefs regarding the number of parent conferences were reflected accurately in team meetings. The sixth grade teachers also expressed beliefs about providing activities for parents which is commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations yet those beliefs were not reflected in team meetings.

The results of this study show that many individual team member beliefs regarding middle school and the school practices and cultural characteristics recommended by the NMSA (2005) are reflected in interdisciplinary team meetings but in varying degrees.

Each of the interdisciplinary teams at Olde Town Middle School is at a different, stage of development. Through no fault of their own, most team members do not understand the middle school concept as a total ecology of schooling. Teams were created years ago for convenience in scheduling students for instruction and until recently, teams were left to function as they thought they should. Team members have had no formal preparation or inservice training for teaching middle school. For the sixth grade team, this meant a focus on children and connecting learning experiences for them.

The seventh grade team, believing that they were a team, focused on personal support for each other. For the eighth grade team, preparing students for the high school was the focus and thus they continued with their traditional junior high school ways.

Conclusions are discussed in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine how the substance of interdisciplinary middle school team meetings reflects individual team member beliefs about the middle school concept and the school practices and cultural characteristics, as delineated by the NMSA (2005), which create successful middle schools for young adolescents.

Significant Finding

The most significant finding in this study was that although teacher beliefs were not necessarily the same for all teams, teacher beliefs were reflected in the substance of team meetings if team members held similar beliefs, if there were no competing priorities, and if the school culture supported their similar beliefs.

Below is a description of the school culture, how the tone of the school culture was set, and examples of the significant finding in this study.

School Culture

The school culture in this study is an environment in which teachers can do whatever they choose unless they are given a specific directive from the principal for which they are held accountable. Such directives within this study were found to be rare. Furthermore, the administrators have not had middle school preparation and the nature of the relationship between the teachers and principal is hierarchical.

Teachers/teams acting as they choose are at odds with the NMSA (2005) recommendations for shared leadership. This is not surprising if one examines the

findings of Jackson and Davis (2000) who reported that few administrators have received training in shared leadership and decision making thus establishing a school culture in which leadership remains hierarchical.

Tone of the School Culture

In this study, the tone of the school culture is set by the principal because of the hierarchical administrative structure. All teachers believe this to be true. Three cases of the principal setting the tone of the school culture emerged from the data. In all three cases, no guidance was provided to the teams.

First, the principal issued directives to the teams and held them accountable which was the case with a requirement that teams conduct parent meetings and communicate frequently with parents.

Second, the principal issued directives for which the teams were *not* held accountable. Written team goals were required yet those team goals were written by the principal. Teams were directed to work on integrated curriculum which may or may not have been commensurate with a team's goals. All teachers were directed to read the NMSA (2003) summary document. With the exception of how team goals were created, these directives from the principal were commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. These directives issued to teams by the administration were contradictory to the NMSA (2005) recommendations of collaborative leadership in the middle school.

Third, in most cases, no directives were given by the principal and teachers remained comfortable with their old ways of teaching in a school culture that supported the status quo. These teacher behaviors support the findings of Wald and Castleberry

(2000) and Daniels (2001) that individuals bring a set of personal beliefs and values that have been formed over the years to the middle school setting and do not often question their beliefs and actions. Dickson and Butler (2001) also found that teachers in middle schools who are comfortable with their old ways of teaching have not examined or been challenged to examine their practice. Teachers in this study did not have formal preparation or in-service training in middle school practices. Their old ways were rooted in their veteran teachers' experiences of either the nurturing child-centered focus of an elementary level background or the subject-centered, high school preparation focus of a secondary level background.

Examples

Teachers on all three teams held strong, common beliefs in the following categories: the nature of leadership, the nature of communication within the team, the use of common planning time, and the importance of parental involvement. These commonly held beliefs were reflected in the substance of team meetings exactly in accordance with individual beliefs. However, these beliefs were not necessarily commensurate with middle school practice but more in line with their own experiences and teacher preparation. Each category is examined separately in terms of the significance of the study.

Leadership was accurately viewed as hierarchical by teachers. Team meetings reflected this belief and the researcher observed evidence that teacher beliefs were accurate. The few administrative directives issued to the teams illustrated the lack of training in shared leadership and decision making on the part of the administration. This is consistent with the findings that few middle level administrators have had formal

education in collaborative leadership deemed critical to the success of a middle school (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Crow & Pounder, 2000; Valentine, Clark, Hackmann & Petzko, 2002). According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), effective leadership is the result of setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization rather than proffering a prescriptive approach to school improvement.

Even though team leaders were named by the administration, teams did not believe that the team leader had any power. This was reflected in the substance of team meetings even though each team held different perceptions of the team leader. The researcher found these perceptions to be accurate. Unless the principal creates the climate for shared leadership, it does not happen.

Teacher beliefs about communication when team members collaborate, although different for all teams, were accurately reflected in the substance of team meetings. One team recognized their difficulty to communicate effectively and team members were working toward collegiality which Fullan (1991) reported is a strong indicator of implementation success. Another team believed that team members communicated effectively which was reflected in the substance of team meetings. However, their effective communication was not related to substantive issues related to middle school practice. Another team believed that team members did not communicate well due to one person who dominated group conversation. This was evident in the substance of team meetings and consistent with the findings of Pounder (1998). Pounder found that some teams may experience members who dominate the group and recommended that an outside consultant address this problem. Each of these communication styles was

supported by the school culture and each illustrates a different stage of team development as team members learn how to communicate effectively (Rottier, 1996).

The substance of each team's collaborative work during common planning time accurately reflected the similar views held by the team members. Those views of particular teams and their members included chaotic meetings, continual discussion of students, conducting parent conferences, and planning activities for students. This is consistent with the findings of Crow and Pounder (2000), Fauske and Schelble (2002), and Anfara and Lipka (2003) that common planning time was primarily devoted to discussing individual students, organizing non-instructional school activities, meeting with parents, and other non-teaming issues.

Teachers fell back on their training and experience as they negotiated the use of common planning time. The principal had given a directive to teams to work on curriculum planning. However, no guidance was provided to the teams and teams were not held accountable for this directive. Thus, use of common planning time was used in whatever way team members chose. For example, teachers trained at the elementary level discussed children. Teachers trained at the secondary level were more concerned about preparing students for the high school and complained about the lack of student responsibility for their learning. They did not see themselves in a nurturing role which is contradictory to the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

Teacher beliefs about connecting with parents were accurately reflected in the substance of team meetings. The administration stressed the importance of frequent teacher/parent contacts and held the teams accountable for communication with parents through team records and his personal communications with parents. Teachers held

strong, shared beliefs about the importance of communicating with parents thus, teacher beliefs were reflected in the substance of team meetings.

During the interviews, veteran teachers stated that they care about children and their families so the researcher believes that teachers held those beliefs and that those beliefs were supported by the school culture rather than being formed by the school culture. Teacher beliefs are only somewhat commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations for family involvement since parental contact is only a small part of the NMSA (2005) recommendation. According to Camblin (2003) and Juvonen, et al., (2004), students are more likely to be successful in school when there is parental involvement. In only one of the teams did parental communication go beyond parent meetings, telephone calls, and e-mail communications. This team held parent/student activity and information nights which is commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

On one team, individual teachers had shared beliefs in these categories: supportive environment, flexible scheduling, curriculum, and assessment and evaluation. These commonly held beliefs were most in concert with the NMSA (2005) recommendations. However, left to their own devices, team members chose to act on those beliefs that they deemed most important. For this team, teacher beliefs that were reflected in the substance of team meetings were nurturing the individual child, parent contact, and heterogeneous grouping of students for instruction. Team member beliefs about curriculum as well as assessment and evaluation were addressed and acted upon, in varying degrees, outside of team meetings.

A second team appeared to operate particularly well as a team and appeared to implement middle school recommendations. Three of the teachers had prior teaming experience in other school settings. Conventional wisdom might cause one to predict that they would take actions consistent with middle school practice. However, this was not the case. Having prior teaming experience did not predict action on beliefs in a formal collaborative setting. Even though team members believed that they communicated well, nothing of substance, related or unrelated to the NMSA (2005) recommendations, was discussed in team meetings. What this means is that team members got along well with each other and personal support for each other was most important to them.

General Findings

Another significant finding in this study is that the length of time a team has been together does not predict improved performance in team functioning. According to Flowers, Mertens, and Mulhall (2000a), middle school teams improve their performance as they improve their teaming practices the longer they have been together. The assumption of these authors is that teams that have been together a long time also share a commitment to the middle school philosophy.

One team had been together for more than ten years and yet team members continued to function as traditional subject-centered junior high school teachers in a school culture that supports a traditional secondary level view of teaching and learning. As a result, team members acted accordingly. This finding supports the research of Brighton and Hertberg (2004) that many middle school teachers' belief systems are consistent with traditional viewpoints of teaching and learning. Individuals must be willing to examine and change their traditional beliefs in order to address the academic

diversity within the middle school environment. On the other hand, another team had also been together for more than ten years and yet these team members functioned more like a middle school team with a child-centered focus and an emphasis on the diversity within the school environment. This may be explained by team members' elementary level beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. What is important to note is that team longevity is not necessarily related to team functioning.

Shifting the School Culture

If the school culture does not provide any guidance to the teams to change, team members act as they perceive they should act. The findings of this study confirmed the findings of McCammon (1992) that in middle school reform efforts, attention was not paid to the building of the team, there was no clear establishment of the team's authority or responsibilities, there was no training or support provided for the teachers, and there were no leadership interventions to assist teachers from shifting from the teacher as an individual to the teacher as a team member.

According to Aubry (1996), Datnow (2000), and Smylie (1988), when schools consider a reform effort, it is important to consider the individual teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning rather than making assumptions about the school faculty as a whole. Individual teachers' perceptions and beliefs about their own practices were the most significant predictors of individual change.

There was evidence that, in some cases, individual teacher beliefs affected team behaviors in team meetings. When team members held similar beliefs that were supported by the school culture, those beliefs were acted upon in team meetings even though they may not have been commensurate with the NMSA (2005) recommendations.

When team members held differing beliefs, those beliefs were not acted upon. Teacher belief systems and the degree to which the school culture supported those beliefs became the predictors of whether or not teacher beliefs were reflected in the substance of team meetings. There was no evidence that team functioning altered teacher belief systems.

According to Elmore (2000), Wald and Castleberry (2000), and Schmoker (1999), the lack of effective top leadership, team leadership, and clear goals are the major reasons why so many middle school reform efforts have failed. Those key elements are essential to the success of middle school reform efforts. In this study, those key elements were absent thus it is predictable that this is yet another middle school reform effort destined for failure. As Katzenbach and Smith (1993) reported, creating a small group of people for the purpose of working together no way ensures that the group becomes a team. The implementation of teaming does not ensure that a school will positively impact student and teacher outcomes. Without effective leadership and continual professional development and support, teaming is not likely to achieve sustained outcomes.

To create successful middle schools, the key elements of a successful middle school as recommended by the NMSA (2005) must be present in a school culture that supports those key elements. Additionally, examination of individual teachers' beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning in relation to the key elements of a successful middle school is essential for any reform effort.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, it would be worthwhile to conduct a replication of this study in other middle schools that are beginning to implement the NMSA (2005) recommendations for a successful middle school. In particular, the

researcher could try to determine whether the significant finding of this study holds in another setting: Teacher beliefs are reflected in the substance of team meetings if team members hold similar beliefs, if there are no competing priorities, and if the school culture supports their similar beliefs.

Recommendations for future research would also include conducting a similar study at the same school within the next few years since interventions were scheduled to be put in place to help this school move toward becoming a successful middle school. The purpose of the study would be to investigate the school's progress, or not, toward becoming a successful middle school and what factors or interventions might affect team development. What was the nature of the intervention(s) if there was a shift in team functioning?

With the challenges of the NCLB mandates for accountability, research could be conducted to investigate whether or not those mandates have affected middle schools that have already been deemed successful middle schools by the NMSA (2005) recommendations. In other words, have successful middle schools abandoned their middle school practices in order to meet the challenges of the NCLB?

Other areas for research might include studying the field experiences of college and university students enrolled in teacher preparation programs. Are students placed in successful middle schools for their field experiences? If they are not, are we perpetuating the middle school status quo for those new teachers who will enter the middle school workplace? Another area of concern should be those teachers who are issued alternative teaching certifications from state departments of education. If they are placed in a middle school teaching position, are they knowledgeable about the middle school concept and

the NMSA (2005) recommendations? If not, we are likely destined to perpetuate the lack of middle school reform and therefore, not provide the appropriate middle school experiences that young adolescents deserve.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I

Please respond to each of the following questions.

1. Age: 25 or less 26-30 31-35 36-40 41- 50 over 50
2. Gender: _____ Female _____ Male
3. What is your certification?
K-8 _____ Secondary _____ Other _____ Please specify _____
4. Major _____
5. Minor _____
6. Degree Status:
Degree Earned _____ Year _____
Degree Earned _____ Year _____
Degree Earned _____ Year _____
7. Number of years teaching _____
9. Years of Teaching Experience:
A. With present team: _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ more than 5
B. With other teams: _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ more than 5
C. Self Contained Classroom: _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ more than 5

Part II

Please circle the number on the right that corresponds with your response. Unless specified, please circle only one response.

1. If you entered teaching after another career, what was your job prior to teaching?

Homemaker.....1
 Education related field.....2
 Customer Service.....3
 Business.....4
 Profession(engineer, law, medicine, etc.)...5
 Social Service.....6
 Other.....7

Please specify _____

For item 2, please use the following key to respond:

Strongly disagree (1)
 Disagree (2)
 Unsure (3)
 Agree (4)
 Strongly agree (5)

2. Circle the response which best describes your current teaching situation.

	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree
A. Sufficient time is available for teachers to meet together.....	1	2	3
	4	5	
B. Opportunities are available for teachers to assume leadership.....	1	2	3
	4	5	
C. Ample support is available for professional development.....	1	2	3
	4	5	
D. Administrative support for faculty is ample.....	1	2	3
	4	5	
E. There is curriculum coordination across grade levels and disciplines.....	1	2	3
	4	5	
F. Teachers are involved in curriculum decision making.....	1	2	3
	4	5	

Appendix A (continued)

- G. Teachers are encouraged to act independently.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
- H. Teachers are encouraged to act collaboratively.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
- I. Parental support exists for teachers.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
- J. The school climate is positive for teachers.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
- K. Personal planning time is ample.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Part III

These questions are about influence patterns at your school.

Each question has five different parts. Please check the appropriate response for each part of each question.

1. How much influence do **you** have over your own

	1 A Great Deal	2 A Considerable Amount	3 A Moderate Amount	4 Not Very Much	5 None
A. Administration of school rules and regulations?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. Student grading practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. Curriculum planning?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. Teaching specific lessons or classes?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
E. Student control and discipline practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2. How much influence does your **team** have over your own

	1 A Great Deal	2 A Considerable Amount	3 A Moderate Amount	4 Not Very Much	5 None
A. Administration of school rules and regulations?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. Student grading practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. Curriculum planning	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. Teaching specific lessons or classes?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
E. Student control and discipline practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Appendix A (continued)

3. How much influence do you have over your **team's** decisions about

	1 A Great Deal	2 A Considerable Amount	3 A Moderate Amount	4 Not Very Much	5 None
A. Administration of school rules and regulations?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. Student grading practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. Curriculum planning?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. Teaching specific lessons or classes?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
E. Student control and discipline practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

4. How much influence do you have in decisions made in your **school** about

	1 A Great Deal	2 A Considerable Amount	3 A Moderate Amount	4 Not Very Much	5 None
A. Administration of school rules and regulations?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. Student grading practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. Curriculum planning?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. Teaching specific lessons or classes?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
E. Student control and discipline practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Appendix A (continued)

5. How much influence does your **team** have over decisions made in your school about

	1 A Great Deal	2 A Considerable Amount	3 A Moderate Amount	4 Not Very Much	5 None
A. Determining the educational goals & objectives of the school?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. Establishing school rules and objectives?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. Student grading practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. General curriculum planning?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
E. Student control and discipline practices?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Part IV

1. Different teams are sometimes organized differently, especially in regard to leadership in the decision making process. Please choose the statement below (A, B, or C) which **best** describes your team's leadership. Mark the space next to the letter corresponding to that statement. Then please read the two statements (a or b) which follow, and mark the space corresponding to the one which further describes your team's leadership.

Please mark only 2 of the 9 spaces below.

- | | |
|-------|---|
| _____ | A. We have an "official" team leader, appointed by the principal, |
| _____ | a. and our official team leader most often provides leadership in the decisions we make. |
| _____ | b. and our official leader, as well as others on the team, all share in providing leadership in the decisions we make. |
| _____ | B. We have no "official" team leader, but our team has agreed upon one person we all recognize as our "unofficial" team leader. |
| _____ | a. Our unofficial team leader most often provides leadership in the decisions we make. |
| _____ | b. Our unofficial team leader, as well as others on the team, all share in providing leadership in the decisions we make. |
| _____ | C. Our team has no "official" leader, nor an "unofficial" one, |
| _____ | a. but one of our team members does seem to act as leader quite often when we make decisions. |
| _____ | b. and leadership seems to be shared equally among all of our team members when we make decisions. |

2. Team configurations and philosophies about departmentalization differ among schools. Please answer each of the following.

A. My school is not departmentalized. _____

B. My school is departmentalized. _____

C. Number of team configurations at my school:

_____ 2 person Grade levels: _____

_____ 3 person Grade levels: _____

_____ 4 person Grade levels: _____

_____ 5 person Grade levels: _____

_____ 6 person Grade levels: _____

_____ other Please specify: _____

Part V

The following section is aimed at collecting information about your team from your perspective.

For item 1, please use the following key to respond:

Strongly disagree (1)

Disagree (2)

Unsure (3)

Agree (4)

Strongly agree (5)

1. Circle the response which best describes how you perceive each of the following:

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
A. The members of our team agree on the objectives we are trying to achieve with our students	1	2	3	4	5
B. Our team has explicit goals for student achievement	1	2	3	4	5
C. We are involved in the hiring process of new teachers	1	2	3	4	5
D. The standards by which my teaching is evaluated are clear and well defined	1	2	3	4	5
E. Team members make new team members feel welcome	1	2	3	4	5
F. Other teams in the building are aware of what our team does	1	2	3	4	5
G. Our team has explicit rules for student conduct	1	2	3	4	5
H. Curriculum integration is important to teaming	1	2	3	4	5
I. Having common students is the prime purpose of teaming	1	2	3	4	5
J. Consensus means having all team members agree	1	2	3	4	5
K. I feel I can express my thoughts at a team meeting	1	2	3	4	5
L. Our team has team rules for working together	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix A (continued)

M. Most team planning time is spent discussing students	1	2	3	4	5
N. Much of team time is spent conferencing with parents	1	2	3	4	5
O. Curriculum integration is discussed at least one meeting per month	1	2	3	4	5
P. Our team has one team planning period per day	1	2	3	4	5
Q. Each team member has one personal planning period per day	1	2	3	4	5
R. Professional reading is important to the teaming process	1	2	3	4	5
S. There is ample professional development opportunity that supports the teaming process	1	2	3	4	5
T. I feel I participate in decisions made by the team	1	2	3	4	5
U. The purpose of teams is to make a small school within a large school, i.e., know students better	1	2	3	4	5
V. The purpose of teams is to improve student achievement	1	2	3	4	5
W. The purpose of teams is to do interdisciplinary units	1	2	3	4	5
X. I'm not sure what the purpose of teams is	1	2	3	4	5
Y. I like being part of a team	1	2	3	4	5
Z. Academic achievement has decreased with teaming	1	2	3	4	5
AA. Teams go through a self evaluation process at least once a year	1	2	3	4	5
BB. Team self evaluation is important to the team concept	1	2	3	4	5
CC. I feel isolated from other teachers in the building	1	2	3	4	5
DD. It is important for teachers from the same discipline to meet regularly	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix A (continued)

EE. Teachers from the same discipline meet regularly and share what they are doing	1	2	3	4	5
FF. It is important for grade level teachers to meet regularly	1	2	3	4	5
GG. Teachers from the same grade level meet regularly and share what they are doing	1	2	3	4	5
HH. Our team shares responsibilities such as facilitator and note taker for the minutes of team meetings	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me how you came to be a middle school teacher.
2. What is your definition of the middle school concept?
3. What is your definition of interdisciplinary teaming?
4. Tell me about the goals, if any, of the team and how they are evaluated.
5. Tell me about any transition programs, exploratory programs, and advisory programs that you have.
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience in becoming a middle school teacher or about your beliefs regarding the middle school concept and interdisciplinary teaming?
7. How satisfying has your teaming experience been up to this point?
8. Tell me about a typical team meeting.
9. Tell me about some meetings where you felt the meeting went well and where you felt the meeting did not go well.
10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about team meetings?
11. In what ways has your teaming experience met or not met your expectations if, in fact, you had expectations?
12. What changes (or growth), if any, have you noticed in yourself as a member of a team?
13. Tell me about some highlights as well as some of the worst parts of your teaming experience.
14. What do you see as the major challenges of interdisciplinary teaming?
15. Is there anything that you would have liked to do differently as a team member?

APPENDIX C

NMSA CATEGORY DEFINITIONS FOR CODING DATA (NMSA, 2005)

Collaborative Leadership: High-performing middle schools have high-performing, learning-centered leaders – principals and teachers- working collaboratively to enhance student learning. The leader must be able to clearly articulate sound educational beliefs and demonstrate by both actions and words that he/she holds firm to them and understands that school improvement is a joint effort. The job of today's principal is to ask questions, rather than provide answers, to facilitate the process of school improvement rather than prescribe how it should be done, to suggest alternatives to former policies and practices rather than mandate the ones that will be used.

Teaming: Five characteristics of effective teams are having a culture of discourse at their center, having a clearly defined purpose that guides their work and specific measurable goals that they achieve, being able to define and commit to norms that guide how the team operates, being disciplined in maintaining their focus, and communicating effectively within the team and with those outside the team. Teams in early stages of implementation focus on student behaviors, parental contacts, and special team activities.

Communication: Communication is defined as a culture of discourse in which team members communicate within the team and with those outside the team.

Common Planning Time and Team Focus: During common planning time teams manage their time, establish performance goals, and engage in curriculum coordination; coordination of student assignments, assessments, and feedback; parental contact and involvement; and contact other building resource staff. However, teams may not have an agenda. Time may be wasted on excessive conversation about matters that cannot be changed or have been discussed repeatedly with no resolution.

Shared Vision: Successful middle schools have a shared vision developed and implemented under the guidance and nurturing of school leaders in collaboration with all the various stakeholders; students, teachers, parents, administrators, school board members, central office personnel, and community members. Without a shared vision that is understood and supported by its stakeholders, middle level school improvement will be seriously flawed and potentially short lived because 'ownership' rests more with a single leader rather than the school community as a whole.

Team Norms: Team norms are defined as being those behaviors that guide how the team operates. Teams will under-perform if members violate the norms of acceptable team behavior by arriving late, grading papers, or missing the meeting altogether.

Knowledgeable Educators: Knowledgeable educators are those educators who have had professional preparation that provides them with the specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be highly accomplished in their practice. Many middle level educators have received little or no specialized professional preparation for teaching young adolescents.

Curriculum: A major programmatic feature of a successful middle school is a curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory. Curriculum decisions place emphasis on educational methods that complement the unique characteristics and needs of young adolescents. Prescribed curricula have long proved inadequate and inappropriate for young adolescents' learning and healthy development.

Flexible Scheduling: Teams are able to adjust and rearrange the instructional time as they see fit to achieve the team's instructional goals. Academic priorities take precedence over regular, fixed-length class periods and ringing bells.

Assessment and Evaluation: NMSA (2003) advocates for continuous, authentic, and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures. Such information helps students, teachers, and family members select immediate learning goals and plan further education. Grades alone are inadequate expressions for assessing and reporting student progress on the many goals of middle school education.

Adult Advocate: Successful middle schools are characterized by an adult advocate for every student who is knowledgeable about young adolescent development, who enjoys working with young adolescents and who comes to know the students well as individuals. An advisory program is a way to address the affective needs of young adolescents while supporting their academic development. Some schools over the past three decades have lost sight of this need.

School Initiated Family and Community Partnerships: These partnerships include activities that keep parents informed about school programs and student progress and involve resources of the community to strengthen school programs. Left on their own, few families continue as active partners in the middle grades. Traditionally, parental involvement meant nothing more than parent conferences and parents' attendance at school events such as a school play.

Supportive Environment: A supportive environment is one in which statements of encouragement and positive feedback outnumber disciplinary or correctional comments. Interactions among staff members and between students reflect democracy, fairness, and mutual respect.

APPENDIX D

NUMBER OF CODES BY CATEGORY FOR INTERVIEW DATA AND TEAM MEETING DATA

Category	Interview Data Number of Coded Phrases	Team Meeting Data Number of Coded Phrases	Total Number of Coded Phrases
Collaborative Leadership	16	1	17
Teaming	37	0	37
Communication	66	63	129
Common Planning Time& Team Focus	23	37	60
Shared Vision	33	0	33
Team Norms	56	50	106
Knowledgeable Educators	58	14	72
Curriculum and Instruction	66	42	108
Flexible Scheduling	9	16	25
Assessment and Evaluation	8	27	35
Adult Advocate	29	9	38
Family & Community Partnerships	14	51	65
Supportive Environment	28	36	64
Guidance & Support Services	20	2	22

APPENDIX E

Personal/Professional Questionnaire Part II Grade 6

Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

Description	History Team Leader	Science	Math	Language Arts	Reading Specialist
A. Sufficient time is available for teachers to meet together	5	5	3	2	5
B. Opportunities are available for teachers to assume leadership	4	4	4	2	4
C. Ample support is available for professional development	5	4	4	4	5
D. Administrative support for faculty is ample	3	4	3	3	5
E. There is curriculum coordination across grade levels and disciplines	3	5	1	1	3
F. Teachers are involved in curriculum decision making	5	5	4	4	5
G. Teachers are encouraged to act independently	4	5	3	1	5
H. Teachers are encouraged to act collaboratively	4	5	3	5	5
I. Parental support exists for teachers	3	3	3	2	2
J. The school climate is positive for teachers	4	4	2	2	4
K. Personal planning time is ample	4	4	1	1	1

Appendix E (continued)

Personal/Professional Questionnaire Part II
Grade 7

Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

Description	Language Arts Team Leader	Science	Math	History	Reading Specialist
A. Sufficient time is available for teachers to meet together	4	2	1	4	5
B. Opportunities are available for teachers to assume leadership	4	2	3	4	4
C. Ample support is available for professional development	5	2	4	4	5
D. Administrative support for faculty is ample	5	2	4	4	5
E. There is curriculum coordination across grade levels and disciplines	1	2	2	2	3
F. Teachers are involved in curriculum decision making	4	2	4	3	5
G. Teachers are encouraged to act independently	4	3	3	4	5
H. Teachers are encouraged to act collaboratively	4	4	5	4	5
I. Parental support exists for teachers	3	1	2	3	2
J. The school climate is positive for teachers	4	2	3	4	4
K. Personal planning time is ample	4	1	3	3	1

Appendix E (continued)

Personal/Professional Questionnaire Part II
Grade 8

Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

Description	Math Team Leader	Science	History	Language Arts	Reading Specialist
A. Sufficient time is available for teachers to meet together	4	3	3	4	5
B. Opportunities are available for teachers to assume leadership	4	2	1	1	4
C. Ample support is available for professional development	5	4	3	4	5
D. Administrative support for faculty is ample	4	4	2	3	5
E. There is curriculum coordination across grade levels and disciplines	2	2	3	2	3
F. Teachers are involved in curriculum decision making	2	4	1	3	5
G. Teachers are encouraged to act independently	4	4	2	2	5
H. Teachers are encouraged to act collaboratively	4	4	2	4	5
I. Parental support exists for teachers	4	4	4	4	2
J. The school climate is positive for teachers	4	4	2	4	4
K. Personal planning time is ample	4	2	1	2	1

Appendix E (continued)

Personal/Professional Questionnaire Part V
Grade 6

Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

Description	History Team Leader	Science	Math	Language Arts	Reading Specialist
A. Members agree with objectives they are trying to achieve with students	4	4	3	3	2
B. Team has specific goals for student achievement	3	3	3	3	3
C. Teachers involved in hiring process	4	4	4	2	5
D. Teaching evaluation process is clear and well defined	4	3	4	4	4
E. Team members make new members feel welcome	2	5	2	2	2
F. Other teams know what our team does	2	4	5	2	2
G. Team has explicit rules for student conduct	3	4	3	4	5
H. Curriculum integration is important to teaming	3	4	3	5	3
I. Common students is the prime purpose of teaming	3	4	3	5	4
J. Consensus means all members agree	2	4	4	5	1
K. I feel I can express my thoughts at a team meeting	4	5	2	1	5
L. Our team has rules for working together	2	3	2	1	1

Appendix E (continued)

Description	History Team Leader	Science	Math	Language Arts	Reading Specialist
M. Most team time is spent discussing students	3	4	5	5	5
N. Much of team time is spent conferencing with parents	4	4	5	5	5
O. Curriculum integration is discussed at least one meeting per month	3	4	3	5	5
P. Our team has one team planning period per day	5	5	5	5	5
Q. Each member has one personal planning period per day	5	5	5	5	5
R. Professional reading is important to the teaming process	3	3	5	5	1
S. There is ample professional development to support teaming	4	3	3	1	5
T. I feel I participate in decisions made by the team	3	5	4	4	5
U. The purpose of team is to make a small school within a large school, i.e., know students better	4	5	4	5	5
V. The purpose of teams is to improve student achievement	3	5	4	5	5
W. The purpose of teams is to do interdisciplinary units	4	5	4	5	3
X. I'm not sure what the purpose of teams is	2	1	2	1	1
Y. I like being part of a team	3	5	3	5	4
Z. Academic achievement has decreased with teaming	1	2	2	3	1

Appendix E (continued)

Description	History Team Leader	Science	Math	Language Arts	Reading Specialist
AA. Teams go through self evaluation process at least once a year	1	3	1	1	1
BB. Team self evaluation is important to the team concept	2	3	5	5	5
CC. I feel isolated from other people in the building	2	1	3	5	1
DD. It is important for teachers from the same discipline to meet regularly	2	4	4	5	4
EE. Teachers from the same discipline meet regularly and share what they are doing	3	4	2	3	3
FF. It is important for grade level teachers to meet regularly	3	4	5	5	5
GG. Teachers from the same grade level meet regularly and share what they are doing	3	4	3	2	4
HH. Our team shares responsibilities such as facilitator and note taker for minutes of team meetings	2	4	1	1	5

Appendix E (continued)

Personal/Professional Questionnaire Part V
Grade 7

Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

Description	Language Arts Team Leader	Science	Math	History	Reading Specialist
A. Members agree with objectives they are trying to achieve with students	4	3	5	3	2
B. Team has specific goals for student achievement	4	2	5	3	3
C. Teachers involved in hiring process	4	4	5	N/A	5
D. Teaching evaluation process is clear and well defined	4	2	5	2	4
E. Team members make new members feel welcome	5	5	5	5	2
F. Other teams know what our team does	3	2	5	4	2
G. Team has explicit rules for student conduct	4	2	4	3	5
H. Curriculum integration is important to teaming	5	2	5	3	3
I. Common students is the prime purpose of teaming	4	2	5	2	4
J. Consensus means all members agree	4	2	3	1	1
K. I feel I can express my thoughts at a team meeting	5	1	5	4	5
L. Our team has rules for working together	4	1	1	2	1
M. Most team time is spent discussing students	3	3	4	4	5

Appendix E (continued)

Description	Language Arts Team Leader	Science	Math	History	Reading Specialist
N. Much of team time is spent conferencing with parents	4	3	2	1	5
O. Curriculum integration is discussed at least one meeting per month	5	1	5	5	5
P. Our team has one team planning period per day	5	4	5	5	5
Q. Each member has one personal planning period per day	5	1	5	5	5
R. Professional reading is important to the teaming process	2	1	1	4	1
S. There is ample professional development to support teaming	5	1	2	3	5
T. I feel I participate in decisions made by the team	5	2	5	2	5
U. The purpose of team is to make a small school within a large school, i.e., know students better	4	3	5	1	5
V. The purpose of teams is to improve student achievement	4	3	5	4	5
W. The purpose of teams is to do interdisciplinary units	4	3	3	3	3
X. I'm not sure what the purpose of teams is	2	3	1	2	1
Y. I like being part of a team	5	2	5	3	4
Z. Academic achievement has decreased with teaming	1	2	1	1	1
AA. Teams go through self evaluation process at least once a year	2	1	2	1	1

Appendix E (continued)

Description	Language Arts Team Leader	Science	Math	History	Reading Specialist
BB. Team self evaluation is important to the team concept	4	2	3	4	5
CC. I feel isolated from other people in the building	3	4	1	4	1
DD. It is important for teachers from the same discipline to meet regularly	5	3	3	4	4
EE. Teachers from the same discipline meet regularly and share what they are doing	1	2	2	2	3
FF. It is important for grade level teachers to meet regularly	5	3	4	5	5
GG. Teachers from the same grade level meet regularly and share what they are doing	5	4	4	4	4
HH. Our team shares responsibilities such as facilitator and note taker for minutes of team meetings	3	4	2	1	5

Appendix C (continued)

Personal/Professional Questionnaire Part V
Grade 8

Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

Description	Math Team Leader	Science	History	Language Arts	Reading Specialist
A. Members agree with objectives they are trying to achieve with students	5	4	2	4	2
B. Team has specific goals for student achievement	4	5	1	3	3
C. Teachers involved in hiring process	4	3	1	2	5
D. Teaching evaluation process is clear and well defined	4	3	2	5	4
E. Team members make new members feel welcome	5	5	1	4	2
F. Other teams know what our team does	4	3	3	2	2
G. Team has explicit rules for student conduct	3	5	2	4	5
H. Curriculum integration is important to teaming	3	4	3	3	3
I. Common students is the prime purpose of teaming	3	4	3	4	4
J. Consensus means all members agree	2	3	2	4	1
K. I feel I can express my thoughts at a team meeting	5	5	1	5	5
L. Our team has rules for working together	3	3	1	1	1

Appendix E (continued)

Description	Language Arts Team Leader	Science	Math	History	Reading Specialist
M. Most team time is spent discussing students	5	4	4	5	5
N. Much of team time is spent conferencing with parents	5	4	5	5	5
O. Curriculum integration is discussed at least one meeting per month	3	3	4	5	5
P. Our team has one team planning period per day	5	5	4	5	5
Q. Each member has one personal planning period per day	5	5	4	5	5
R. Professional reading is important to the teaming process	3	3	1	2	1
S. There is ample professional development to support teaming	4	2	1	4	5
T. I feel I participate in decisions made by the team	5	4	1	4	5
U. The purpose of team is to make a small school within a large school, i.e., know students better	3	3	3	4	5
V. The purpose of teams is to improve student achievement	4	5	3	4	5
W. The purpose of teams is to do interdisciplinary units	4	4	3	2	3
X. I'm not sure what the purpose of teams is	4	1	3	2	1
Y. I like being part of a team	5	5	3	4	4
Z. Academic achievement has decreased with teaming	1	1	2	2	1

Appendix E (continued)

Description	Language Arts Team Leader	Science	Math	History	Reading Specialist
AA. Teams go through self evaluation process at least once a year	3	1	1	1	1
BB. Team self evaluation is important to the team concept	3	5	5	5	5
CC. I feel isolated from other people in the building	4	1	4	2	1
DD. It is important for teachers from the same discipline to meet regularly	4	5	4	4	4
EE. Teachers from the same discipline meet regularly and share what they are doing	2	5	3	1	3
FF. It is important for grade level teachers to meet regularly	4	5	3	5	5
GG. Teachers from the same grade level meet regularly and share what they are doing	4	5	3	3	4
HH. Our team shares responsibilities such as facilitator and note taker for minutes of team meetings	4	1	1	1	5

APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

July 22, 2005

Donna Cronin
Education, Morrill Hall
94 Sanborn Road
East Kingston, NH 03827

IRB #: 3490
Study: Interdisciplinary Teaming Perspectives on Teacher Relationships in
Team Decision-making Processes
Approval Date: 07/21/2005

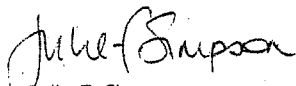
The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Judith Robb

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research, Service
Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585 * Fax: 603-862-3564